Old Testament Heroes of the Faith

Frank T. Lee, D. D.

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MAP OF OLD TESTAMENT WORLD

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OLD TESTAMENT HEROES of the FAITH

and

Other Old Testament Character Studies

By

REV. FRANK T. LEE, D.D.

Author of

"Popular Misconceptions as to Christian Faith and Life"
"Bible Study Popularized"
"Sidelights on the Bible"
"The New Testament Period and its Leaders'

1920

THE STRATFORD CO., Publishers

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

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The STRATFORD CO., Publishers
Boston, Mass.

The Alpine Press, Boston, Mass., U. S. A.

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To My Long-time Friend, Tried and True,

Rev. William D. Westervelt
Honolulu, H. I.

Foreword

THE writer has always delighted in extensive views—as over cities and large tracts of country. Accordingly in journeying through Europe and the Holy Land, as well as in this country, it has been his custom, so far as practicable, to seek out high places, lofty buildings, towers or mountain tops for the sake of the extended outlooks afforded by them.

The more important of these views have been so indelibly impressed as never afterward to be forgotten or materially to fade from memory. Some of them, like that from Mt. Washington in New Hampshire, Mt. Washburn in the Yellowstone Park, heights in Switzerland, or especially that from Mt. Hermon, nearly two miles high, over the Holy Land, still seem as distinct and vivid as when originally beheld, now many years ago. One result of all this was added incentive to visit afterward and carefully examine the various points of interest within the region embraced.

Similarly in regard to the great field of reading and study presented in the Scriptures: there has been the same desire and corresponding effort to gain comprehensive views, wide outlooks over extended periods of Bible history; over the lives, as a whole, of the great characters set forth; or over entire books, with analyses or outlines of their contents. To this end, frequent reading at a sitting of the entire Scripture involved, has proved especially helpful, and this to a degree not to be realized by reading a single chapter only or a few verses at a time, as is too often the case. And not only do these larger views and this broader study yield a peculiar satisfaction in themselves—

they tend to stimulate to a more minute study of the subjects later and with a better appreciation.

In the lectures or addresses which are given in this volume, the constant aim has been to present bird's-eye views over wide Bible areas, hoping thus to deepen interest and to awaken desire for further and more minute study of the subjects later.

In some such way as this an intelligent comprehension and grasp of the wide fields of the Bible and a proper interpretation and appreciation of the sacred message will be greatly facilitated.

These lectures were originally given before churches, schools and colleges, white and colored, of various denominations, Bible Institutes and Associations, in the Southeastern states while the author was connected, for several years, as Bible Extension lecturer with a Theological Seminary in the South. A series of Bible maps was used on which scripture places referred to were pointed out, thus adding very materially to the interest. The lectures have also been given at Sunday evening services in connection with pulpit supply work. The interest everywhere manifested has been a gratifying surprise. Instead of a lessened attentiveness because of more or less familiarity with the subjects, as was feared might be the case, the very fact of some acquaintance with the characters and the narratives seemed only to prompt a greater eagerness to listen. The suggestion was frequently made that the lectures, which included subjects from both the Old Testament and the New, character studies, book studies, reviews of historical periods, and the like—be published.

Some of these lectures—especially character studies from the Old Testament—are herewith presented substantially as they were originally delivered, with practical lessons and applications drawn therefrom. As intended for popular audiences,

technical questions of Biblical criticism, as such, were given little prominence. The main aim was to bring out the subject matter of the scripture in each case, studying the subject in its historical settings, rather than to discuss critical questions. If, as the chapters are read, the places referred to are looked up on appropriate Bible maps, the interest will be much enhanced, while the real profit of the perusal will be greatly increased by a careful reading afterward of the corresponding scripture.

It is hoped that the book may prove to be a slight contribution toward a more general and deeper interest in the reading and study of the Bible, particularly of the Old Testament, among the intelligent, every-day members of our congregations. It has also been thought that the method employed may prove suggestive to some pastors as showing what rich material, homiletic and otherwise, for pulpit use, may be found in the Old Testament Scriptures, particularly for the Sunday evening service. The study itself along these lines will be found to be increasingly fascinating.

F. T. L.

PART I
Old Testament Heroes of the Faith

ABRAHAM

CHAPTER I

(Map of Old Testament World)

(Gen. 11:27 — 25:10)

ONE of the most interesting and profitable lines of Bible study is that of the notable characters which are set forth in Scripture. Among these a few loom up like gigantic and towering mountain peaks among surrounding heights. Such are Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Paul, and various others. Each had a distinct individuality of his own; each stood for some great truth or principle or movement, and though none were perfect, often fell short of the clearer light and higher standards of today, they nevertheless present instructive lessons for all time, especially in the realm of religious experience. In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews we have a remarkable portrait gallery, an immortal list of some of these great characters of the past. As long as the world endures they will be held up to emulation and to honor. Their title to this enduring fame rests not upon their military prowess, statesmanship, or literary achievement simply, but rather upon the moral grandeur of their characters, the spiritual qualities which they exhibited, above all upon the greatness of their faith or confidence in the unseen God, their absolute trust in his words of promise, and their unhesitating obedience even when they could see no reason for it, and this long before the dawn of the Christian era and the fuller light then given to the world.

Among these great heroes of the faith, Abraham stands out with particular conspicuousness in an age of prevailing idolatry, and when a knowledge of the one true God had almost

vanished from the earth. With him there opens a new chapter in the history of the race. To him must be traced the monotheism of today, although others, here and there, may have arrived at the same belief. He was the founder of the Jewish race through which the knowledge of the one true God was perpetuated, and out of which, at length, came the more complete revelation of himself in the person of his son, Jesus Christ. He has been fittingly called the "father of the faithful." The study of the life and work of such man cannot fail to be of interest and profit.

The story of Abraham as it comes down to us in the Old Testament, consists of a series of sketches so woven together by the editor or compiler of the narrative as to present the semblance at least of a fairly complete biography. No sufficient and satisfactory reason has been adduced for disbelieving that such a personage as Abraham once lived, or the reality of the narrative in its essential features. The purpose of the compiler was evidently not so much to preserve all existing traditions of the patriarch as to select such as would best illustrate the origin of the Israelitish nation, and how the hand of divine providence was in it all through with reference to its future.

The name of Abraham's father was Terah, and his birthplace was in Ur of the Chaldees in the lower part of the valley of the Euphrates and the Tigris—seat of the earliest civilization of western Asia. It was a country full of populous cities, with highly developed agriculture and commerce. Learning and culture prevailed. All this has been brought to light by excavations in this region during the past century. Ancient inscriptions together with various articles have been unearthed, and in this way facts of the early history of the race, far antedating all historical records, have been made known. We are

not accustomed to think of Abraham's surroundings as having been of this sort, but the facts brought to light make it clear. As there was a nomadic population which dwelt in tents and roamed the country with flocks and herds in the regions about Ur, it is not improbable that Terah's clan was of this class. This was somewhat more than 2000 B. C., or more than four thousand years ago.

Before taking up the story of Abraham's life it is important to understand something of the geographical background and the historical settings of the narrative. (See map of Old Testament World.) The map shows that part of the world in which the events recorded in the Old Testament took place. It includes southwestern Asia where the old empires were—the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, in succession—and northeastern Africa, seat of the Egyptian empire. The area of this region may have been about the same as that of the United States east of the Mississippi. There were three great rivers—the Nile, the Euphrates and the Tigris. Some of the great cities of the olden time were Nineveh, Babylon, Susa, Ur and others. Only vast mounds remain to indicate their location. Excavations into these mounds show that these cities were older by some thousands of years than has generally been supposed and also that they were more civilized. Among the old inscriptions discovered have been some which have confirmed a number of the events referred to in the Old Testament, or which have filled out their meager narrations. No doubt many other inscriptions may be unearthed in due time. The two sections of the Old Testament World, the Asiatic and the African, were separated largely by the Arabian desert. They were connected by a narrow strip of country bordering upon the Mediterranean, anciently called Canaan, more recently Palestine—a kind of isthmus separating the Mediter-

ranean Sea from the Arabian desert. Owing to this desert, which extended a considerable distance to the northward, a long detour was necessary in traveling from east to west or the reverse.

The city of Ur was located on the right bank of the Euphrates, not far from its mouth at that time (Map). It was a great city commercially. Its ships traded with Ethiopia and lands bordering on the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The people were idolatrous, worshiping many gods, the sun, moon, and the planets, as well as deities representing the forces of nature. The characters ascribed to these deities were degraded and the effect, naturally, was degraded lives on the part of the worshipers. Their Temples were the scenes of human sacrifices and other abominations. Nothing is now to be seen of the ancient city except a series of low mounds, covering a space of two miles in extent, although ruins of a magnificent Temple to the moon god, the leading deity, have been discovered.

Terah had three sons. Like the people about them, the family seems to have been idolatrous. But it is plain that Abraham in some way early became possessed with the idea of but one God, and He supreme and over all. This conviction deepening, at length determined his future course. No doubt the more he reflected, the stronger this conviction became. There seem to have been two distinct migrations of Terah's family from Chaldea toward Canaan; at least two different stages of it. In Genesis the first movement is ascribed to Terah; in Acts (Stephen's address), to Abraham. However this may be, preparations were made to leave Ur to go to some section of the country which may not have been entirely clear at the time.

We can imagine the setting out—Terah and most of his family, including Abraham, his wife Sarah, his nephew, Lot,

and their numerous attendants, with their flocks and herds. Their course would be northwestward up the valley of the Euphrates. At length they would come to Babylon where now are only extensive mounds. Finally leaving the Euphrates, they would come into the region of Haran (Map). Here, for some reason, perhaps the increasing infirmities of Terah, or the favorable pasturage in the vicinity, or both, they were led to end their journey. It was a frontier town of Babylonia, located upon a great highway or caravan route extending from the Orient to the Mediterranean. It was an important military point also, not only commanding this great thoroughfare, but numerous others which radiated from it to Assyria and the East, to Babylonia and Persia, to Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, and on to Egypt. It was a great cross-roads town—an important center of trade, also, for a wide extent of country. At present only a small village marks the site of this ancient center.

Haran became the home of Terah for many years. A brother of Abraham, who had remained behind, joined the family later. After Terah's death, at length, there was a change in the plans of the family. A second or more definite call or impulse came to migrate toward Canaan, this time with a great promise attached. How the call came, whether by direct revelation, or dream, or vision, or voice within, or as a result of long meditation, is not clear. The call came somehow, was recognized, and Abraham prepared to respond. In the light of after events, the object of all was clear, even if it may not have been entirely so at the time. He was to be settled in a country suitable for the providential training of a people who were afterwards to be the medium of great blessings to the world. Three distinct blessings were promised—first, that God would lead him to the particular land; second, that Abra-

ham would found a great nation; third, it would be the means of blessing to all the families of the earth.

So Abraham prepared to go forth, although, in the language of scripture, "not knowing whither he went." Such faith, in that age, was marvelous. His going forth was really the migration of a tribe—there may have been several hundreds, perhaps a thousand in the company. This estimate is based upon the fact that not many years later three hundred were able to bear arms. A large number of men would be required to care for the extensive flocks and herds. Wealth, in those days, was often measured by the extent of these flocks.

The setting out of such a caravan must have been an imposing spectacle. The route is not entirely clear. It would be determined largely by available supplies of food and water. They may have followed the caravan route, skirting the desert, which led to Damascus, then through Bashan, east of the sea of Galilee, crossing the Jordan below it where was a fording place, then into the interior of the land of Canaan until they came to Shechem (Map). Here they halted. A new revelation was made to Abraham at this point—a more definite promise was given to him. Although childless, and seemingly hopelessly so, it was declared that his seed should possess the land. And we read that Abraham believed and here built an altar to the Lord, his witness in a new land of his belief, and as a protest, also, against the idolatry and polytheism all about him.

After remaining in Shechem for a time, Abraham moved on a short distance to the southwest, halting on the high ground east of Bethel, or but a few miles north of what was afterwards Jerusalem. It was a region of fine pasturage, something always necessary to consider. Here, as everywhere, he built an altar in recognition of the God he trusted. At length a serious trial beset him. A mighty famine arose. In the emergency he

resolved to move on to Egypt, the only country which at that time promised relief. The annual overflow of the Nile kept the land fertile through which it flowed. He would return to Canaan after the drought had passed.

But no sooner had Abraham reached this land than he found himself in trouble—brought on by himself, the outgrowth of what seems to have been a lapse of faith. His wife, Sarah, was a woman of great personal attractiveness, and his fear was that some powerful personage might covet her for his wife and he himself be slain to bring this about; so he persuaded Sarah to say that she was his sister. (Really she was his half-sister, though his wife). In this way he thought his safety would be secured. But it worked just the other way. The report of the officers of the government that a great sheik with a beautiful sister had come, led the King to desire to add her to his harem, and she was taken to the palace with a view to honorable marriage in due time. Large presents were bestowed upon Abraham, as her brother, as a dowry. The King's course was straight-forward. How Abraham's conscience must have stung him! But unbelieving as he had been, Providence interposed to shield him from the consequences of his folly. A mysterious illness falling upon the King's household was interpreted as being due to the presence of a foreign woman, and Abraham was sent for. When the King learned the truth of the situation he rebuked him severely and with scornful indignation. It must have been a humiliating experience indeed for Abraham to be thus rebuked by a heathen King. He had lied when the simple truth would have served his purpose better and saved him all this embarrassment and trouble.

It is not stated how long Abraham remained in Egypt, but probably not longer than was absolutely necessary. Finally, he set out on the return, going first to the border of Canaan,

then advancing to his old camping ground at Bethel. Here, no doubt chastened in spirit, he again called upon Jehovah. He had learned one great lesson—others were to follow.

Now another trial comes to him and this time a noble aspect of his character is brought to view. The cause of this new trial was the very prosperity which had come to him. His nephew, Lot, had his own share in the general possessions, i. e., the flocks and herds. But the time had now come when the two households could no longer dwell in peace together and it seemed wise to separate. First the herdsmen disputed about the boundaries and wells and pasturages. Then the two men are drawn into a quarrel and a life-long alienation is threatened. Thus far their common interests, trials and dangers, had bound them together. But Abraham rose to the occasion. Taking Lot to an extensive outlook over the land he says: "Let there be no strife between thee and me, and my herdsmen and yours." Then with unselfish generosity he bids his nephew choose such part of the land as seemed to him most desirable, while he, Abraham, would take the rest. Lot, without demurring at all, accepted the offer and chose the foot of the fertile Jordan valley. He was not deterred by the fact of the wicked cities of Sodom and Gommorrah being there—selfish personal advantage alone seems to have been his motive.

Abraham was naturally grieved at this separation in the circumstances, yet in this new season of trial a fresh revelation was granted him, reiterating all previous assurances and enlarging upon them. He was bidden to lift up his eyes and behold the whole land as far as he could see in all directions, as his own. All this was to be the possession of his posterity, which would be as the sands of the seashore for multitude. Thereupon he selected Hebron as a more permanent abiding place and there built an altar to Jehovah.

Another incident in the experience of the patriarch is of interest as bringing out still another noble phase of his character—his forgiving spirit, a further fruitage of his faith. The deep valley which Lot had chosen was very populous as well as fertile. Near its center were no less than five towns known as the "Cities of the Plain." Sodom and Gomorrah belonged to them. The control of the plain was always important to the great powers to the eastward on the Euphrates, since through it passed the natural route from Damascus and the north, to Arabia, and so from Babylon to the Red Sea and Egypt. To keep this route open for commerce and for military purposes, political control over the plain and the neighboring tribes was sought. The ruling power in west central Asia at this time was Elam, whose King was Chedorlaomer. The cities of the plain having revolted and refused to pay tribute, he sent a force to overcome and punish them. First he swept the country surrounding them, then attacked the cities themselves. His army was victorious. Many of the inhabitants were made prisoners and much booty was taken. Abraham's nephew Lot was among the prisoners.

When word of what had occurred reached Abraham at Hebron, he collected all the members of his clan who were capable of bearing arms and then—probably accompanied by powerful allies from the tribes about—he started in pursuit. He overtook the foe at Dan, 120 miles to the northward, where they had encamped not thinking of pursuit, and had taken no precautions against surprise. Abraham, dividing his forces, attacked the enemy at night on several sides. The outcome was that the Elamites were routed and fled in confusion in all directions.

Abraham secured the spoil and the prisoners including Lot and pursued the fleeing enemy for a considerable distance, then

he returned to the valley of the Jordan bringing the captives and the booty with him. Here the popular gratitude was variously manifested. Abraham declined the reward proposed by the King of Sodom—would not be brought under obligation to him, a heathen King, but when the King of Salem, afterwards Jerusalem, whose name was Melchizedek, blest him in the name of the most high God, he accepted his presents and gave to him a portion of the spoils. He seemed to recognize in Melchizedek a fellow worshiper of Jehovah amid the surrounding paganism.

There were many interesting and significent incidents in the life of Abraham following the victory over Chedorlaomer, all having their bearing upon his steadily enlarging faith. These we must largely pass over, including the touching story of Hagar, his pleading prayers for wicked Sodom, and further revelations which were made to him. He lived quietly at Hebron for many years, respected by his friends and feared by his enemies. There were times when his faith wavered, especially when no heir, upon whom all promises of the future hinged, was born. But whenever his faith began to fail or he became sick at heart from hope long deferred, some new revelation was made to him, or some fresh reiteration of promises already given.

Finally the time drew near when the great promise of a son was to be verified. It was declared to him that at a particular season a son and heir would be born. At length to the great joy of the parents and of the whole camp, the promise was fulfilled, and the name Isaac was given to the son. Through him, according to the original promise, great blessings were to come to the world, and now for many years, peace and happiness and hope prevailed in the patriarch's home. The son was growing into manhood and Abraham's many trials seemed to be over. He felt secure in the future.

But his probation was not yet complete. He had endured many tests of his faith, but another, the most severe of all, was at hand. Would he come through this new ordeal victorious? Would he rise from the seeming destruction of all his hopes and still hold fast his confidence?

The story as it is given in Genesis, of how God called him to sacrifice his only son in whom all his hopes centered, has been an embarrassment and a stumbling block to many. Some have become skeptical as a result of it, as if God were requiring an unnatural and inhuman thing in asking such a sacrifice. But there are several considerations which may be noted in this connection which may help to relieve the difficulty, even to showing that in view of the thought and customs of that age it may have come about in a natural way after all. As a matter of fact it was not at all uncommon among Semite races in that early age, even those devoted to pagan worship, to feel that they must give up the dearest of all their possessions to their deity, whoever or whatever he might be. Human sacrifices were frequently practiced in this connection to meet this supposed obligation, often the sacrifice of the first born. The moral sense of that age was not shocked as now it would be over such a thing. In the circumstances it would not have been at all strange if Abraham, conscientious and anxious to please God in every way and to obey him, should, as he continued to reflect, have come to a similar conclusion, with a growing conviction that he ought to make this great sacrifice, even of his only son—upon whom rested all his hopes. Should he not be as willing as the heathen? It may have come to him with such force as to lead him really to think that Jehovah called him to do it.

Then again we must remember that it was the constant practice of the Old Testament writers, as was the thought of

the times, to attribute everything directly to Jehovah. What we would think of as having been brought about by secondary causes, or by one's own volition, they would attribute to Jehovah. For example, if one were to die of some malignant disease, we would say that that was the cause. They would say Jehovah did it. So if Abraham in a most natural way came to the conviction that he ought to make this great sacrifice, he would say, and the writers of the narrative would say, that Jehovah called him to do it. He evidently believed that this was literally true, when it may simply have been his own conviction of his duty. Furthermore, we should remember that the narrative comes down to us not necessarily as pure history, but more as traditions handed down from father to son, perhaps through generations, and this was the form the story had taken when it was incorporated in the general narrative.

While considerations such as these may not prove entirely satisfactory, they may at least throw some light on a difficult problem, and at any rate suggest that if we were able to put ourselves back in those old times and fully to understand and enter into the prevailing current of thought, this and many other difficulties of the Sacred Word might be greatly relieved if not made to disappear altogether. The main thing after all is the lesson—here a great lesson of faith.

Now let us proceed with the story. The trial came, in a sense, suddenly, although Abraham's whole career may have been a preparation for it. He had learned the lesson of unquestioning obedience—his life had been full of such experiences. Now he feels called to a greater sacrifice than ever before, one which, it would seem, would cut off at a stroke all the hopes which he cherished for the future. It was no less than to offer his only son, dearly beloved, center of all his

hopes, to Jehovah. With this solemn conviction, what will he do? Will he be obedient still? What can he do but bow in submission? Whatever Jehovah enjoins, he would reason, must be right. If it meant to surrender everything dear to him, give up everything which had been promised—son, lands, possessions—so be it. There was nothing else for a trusting, obedient servant of God to do.

It is a sad story. We see the patriarch bowed with sorrow, rising early, telling no one of his intentions. With his own hands he makes the necessary preparations for the journey to Mount Moriah where the sacrifice was to take place. It was at some distance from Beersheba where he seems to have been living at the time. Although he might have called upon many to assist, he himself cleaves the wood and rouses two of his servants to accompany him, Isaac also, and they set out upon the journey. Isaac was now about twenty years of age. For three days they travel, Abraham bearing a heavy load of sorrow in his heart. God only knows what he endured. At length the mountain is in sight—the mountain or hill which was later to become the site of Jerusalem. Here he bade his servants halt. He told them that he and the lad would go yonder and worship and return. He would have none but God witness the dreaded deed. Thereupon he laid the wood for sacrifice upon Isaac's shoulder and the two, father and son, went on their way. Then the latter said as he toiled along, "Where is the lamb for sacrifice?" How the question, so innocently put, must have gone to the father's heart! He does not reveal the terrible secret however. He answered evasively, although as it proved, truly, "My son, God will himself provide a lamb for the offering."

Reaching the place a simple altar of stones or earth is built and the wood is laid in order upon it. Then, if not before, the

dread design is unfolded. What Isaac may have thought as he trudged along, whether he had any suspicions of the truth, what passed between father and son, is nowhere told. Isaac might have resisted and escaped, no doubt, but he evidently acquiesced in willing though sorrowful obedience—obedience to the father whom he believed and trusted to be acting in obedience to God. After being bound hand and foot he was laid upon the altar. Faithful and obedient son of a faithful and devoted father. We scarcely know which to admire most, the father's brave spirit or the son's meek resignation. Then, with breaking heart, but firmly, the patriarch takes the knife, raises his hand and is about to let it fall. Another instant the son would have been slain and all would have been over. But just at that moment Abraham was restrained. A Voice—was it a voice directly from heaven, or a sudden conviction, or a still, small voice within?—was heard bidding him to desist. The trial or test of his faith was ended. Abraham had gone far enough to prove his faith. He had endured the test—the victory was won—nothing more was necessary. "Lay not thy hand upon the lad," says the voice, "Neither do thou anything unto him, for now I know thou fearest God and hast not withheld from Him even thine only son." Then Isaac was unbound and released. Thus, as it were from the dead, Abraham received his son.

But although Isaac is spared, the sacrifice is still to be performed. God had shown that he would not accept a human sacrifice—henceforth such a thing would be abomination to him. As Abraham looked about he discovered a ram close by, his horns caught in a thicket, and so he offered this animal in place of his son. Then, as father and son stood there wondering at all that had taken place, a voice was again heard announcing the divine reward of the great deed. Abraham was

called by name, a blessing was pronounced upon him, and promises which had previously been made were solemnly reiterated and confirmed.

This was the last recorded revelation to Abraham, but the promises were repeated to Isaac, and thereafter, until their fulfillment came in Jesus Christ, through whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. Well might Abraham call that hallowed spot Jehovah-Jireh—the Lord will provide.

Thus closed the momentous episode, and the grateful, trusting, awe-struck father and son return to the servants who had been left at the halting place, and then they make their way back southward to their home.

What remains need not detain us. For some years Abraham continued at Beersheba then moved northward to his old quarters at Hebron. Here he was compelled to face another sorrow in the death of his trusted companion, Sarah. He buried her in the cave of Machpelah which he purchased as a family burial place, and in which he was himself laid away, as were also Isaac and Isaac's son, Jacob. Abraham mourned the loss of his wife for a number of years, then, his hour having come, he also departed, at a ripe age, to be with the Lord.

The life of Abraham is suggestive all through. It is plain to see how he came to be regarded among the Jewish people as a foremost example, among many notable instances, of a vital faith in God. He was really a pioneer in the religious realm. He started out alone without the experience of others to guide him. He had to feel his way along, as it were, groping in the dark sometimes, but he found the path of obedience to God the path of blessing and the condition of further disclosures of his will. He had his hours of wavering faith, but God dealt kindly and patiently with him, restoring him to his favor when-

ever he returned to him, all the time seeking to lead him along into a more perfect trust. So his faith grew strong as he continued to obey until at last he was able to endure the severest ordeal or test which could possibly come to anyone. He could not have endured it earlier probably, but now, after all his experience of God's goodness, he feels assured that hard as the trial is, it is somehow all right on God's part, and although his heart is wrung with sorrow, he proceeds to obey. It is a sublime exhibition of faith in the unseen God in that early age.

So there are times in the Providence of God when we are brought face to face with some great and terrible trial. We feel that we have been led along hitherto—God has helped us through many an ordeal. But now something confronts us which is different from anything heretofore experienced. We are placed in circumstances which seem intolerable. We are in the dark for days, weeks, months—not a ray of light appears. The heavens are as brass above us—our prayers seem not to rise.

Or we are threatened with the loss of our possessions—our little all, or of a child, companion, or some dear friend. Or the loss actually occurs; it comes with a shock and we are left speechless and dumb. The light of life has gone out, the future is dark and cheerless, there seems little, if anything, left to live for. Any one of a thousand distressing things—sorrows, trials, calamities—may come in the providence of God, and here the temptation arises to doubt, to question, to distrust the goodness, the love, the providential care of God, His personal interest in us, to let go the confidence which has grown up during a life time. Has God forgotten us, we cry out in agony of spirit, have we been side-tracked, left to ourselves, overlooked, uncared for when, of all times, His help is most needed?

And so past deliverances are forgotten, all the clear tokens of God's thoughtful love are set aside, they mean nothing in the presence of the great overwhelming trial. It is a time of testing for us. Our faith is being tried in some particular way as Abraham's was in the way we have seen. Will we hold fast our confidence through all, even though the darkness continues long, and the suffering and agony, even though we are stripped of everything we hold dear, even though the heavens fall? Will we still cling to God and to his words of promise, and trust Him somehow to bring us safely through? The question is, is our faith adequate, will it endure the strain, or will it give way and we be overwhelmed? It is a serious question.

Abraham was subjected to a severer test than most of us are likely to experience, and yet so implicit was his trust that he believed that it was right, in some way, even though he could not understand it. And Jehovah rewarded his faith, brought him safely through, as he has brought many others safely through, as he is ready to stand by us in our ordeals and bring us safely through. Just how—the process, the outcome—we may not know, but somehow, by some means, and to some result all right from the higher point of view, this is certain. And so the experience operates as a test of our faith, disclosing the degree of it, just as Abraham had his trial disclosing the degree of his faith. Some such supreme test is likely, sooner or later, to come to us all if it has not come already.

What we need to do at such times is not, as is so often the case, to forget God's fidelity to us all our lives long, that never once has He left or forsaken us, that His promises have never failed, but all the more to remember His goodness, recall the specific instances of it and then resolutely to face and go forward into the trial, even though not knowing whither we go or to what it will lead, with the confidence of Paul when he

said "I know whom I have believed;" or of Job, "Though he slay me yet will I trust him;" or the prophet of whom God had said "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through rivers they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee;" or the Psalmist, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with me;" or the assurance of the Lord Jesus himself, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end."

It is by the faithful endurance of these tests or trials of our trust which come to us, that our faith will grow stronger and stronger, until at last we can face the severest ordeals which come into human experience with composure, and know something of that inward peace which passeth all understanding and flows in the soul like a river. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee because he trusteth in thee."

May God help us to emulate the faith of Abraham who could go forth confidently although not knowing whither, and in a supreme hour face the gravest ordeal and come through more than conqueror.

JACOB

CHAPTER II

(Maps of Palestine and the Old Testament World.)

THE stories of the Patriarchs are always interesting—never seem to lose this interest. They are often pathetic, touching even yet as they are read, even though three or four thousand years after their time. They are instructive too and great and important lessons are still impressed by them, especially lessons of faith and its high reward. These Patriarchs were often very crude, to say the least, in their morals, judged by the standards of today, but we are not to forget the age in which they lived and the standards which then prevailed. With all their shortcomings morally, as we regard them, they were far in advance of most of the men of their times, and we of our day, with all our light and privilege, have much to learn from them.

Sometimes the question is raised as to whether these patriarchal characters are strictly historical, or whether more or less of the traditional element enters into the narratives of them. The question is an interesting one for Biblical scholars. Some differences of opinion prevail. No doubt the traditional element does enter into them more or less. These stories were probably handed down orally long before they were gathered together for preservation in written form. Such is believed to have been the case here. But so far as the usefulness of the stories is concerned it doesn't really make so much difference. The narratives were given primarily for the sake of the spiritual lessons which they impress, and we do well to be open-minded with reference to them.

The story of Jacob is one of the most dramatic and powerful in the Bible.

Jacob's father was Isaac, his mother Rebecca. He and his elder twin brother, Esau, were the only children. Their early life was the usual life of Bedouin boys, sons of a great sheik. As the father roamed over south Palestine with reference to pasturage for his flocks, the boys would accompany him, and so became familiar with the ordinary routine of pastoral life and such rude agriculture as then prevailed. But the tastes of the two boys were different. Esau was interested in hunting and gave himself much to it. Jacob was more domestic, inclined to remain at home, looking after the flocks and assisting in home matters generally. Unfortunately Esau became the favorite of his father and Jacob of his mother. When such favoritism exists in families it always leads to mischievous consequences, and so it proved in this case.

One of the traits manifested early by Jacob, and which never entirely left him, was a certain sharpness or shrewdness or trickiness of disposition. Two instances are given which illustrate this. One was his purchase from his brother Esau of the birthright, playing a sharp game to do it, taking advantage of the sore straits of his brother at the time. There were certain advantages or privileges connected with the birthright which were regarded as belonging to the eldest son in patriarchal times, and more or less so in some lands ever since. One was the right of succeeding to the father's rule in the family and the tribe, becoming sheik, or king on a small scale, as the family became a tribe. Another was the right to a double portion of the inheritance. Still another was the right of officiating as priest in the tribe. These were some of the hereditary privileges of the firstborn.

Jacob coveted all this. At length he had a chance, as he thought, to secure the birthright. Esau came in one day from the chase sore and hungry. Very likely he had been unsuccessful. Perhaps he had been tramping since early dawn. He was completely "done up." Jacob had just prepared a tempting dish of pottage, a kind of dish then common. Esau seeing it felt an irresistible craving for it and begged some of it from his brother. It would certainly have been the brotherly thing to do for Jacob to have given him some, but it flashed upon him that this was his opportunity. "Sell me your birthright" was his reply to Esau's request. The latter may have been startled by such a suggestion, but the urgency of his hunger made him reckless and he consented. Jacob even insisted upon his swearing that he would do so, that there might be no backing out afterwards if Esau should be tempted to do so after realizing what he had done. So the oath was taken, the bargain was completed, and Jacob gave Esau the savory dish. Thus Esau disposed of that great gift, his birthright, for a "mess of pottage." He was weak, thoughtless, foolish, but Jacob was mean and tricky. Whether in later years the father refused to recognise the bargain or not, we do not know, but the disposition of Jacob was made manifest in the transaction.

For some years after this things remained much as they were before. If ill-will existed between the brothers, nothing is said about it. At length when Isaac became old and the infirmities of age reminded him of his approaching end, he felt it his duty to set his house in order and to make all necessary preparations. An important part of the latter was the formal bestowment of the ancestral blessing upon his elder son. So one day Isaac summoned Esau into his presence and told him of his purpose, but requested him first to provide him with a savory dish of venison of which he was very fond, to gird him

for the effort. So Esau started out to procure the venison by hunting as was his wont.

Then it was that Rebecca, the mother, who had overheard the conversation, took a hand in the proceedings with a view to preventing Esau from receiving the blessing, and securing it for her favorite son Jacob. Her great love for the latter rendered her unscrupulous as to the means. She would take advantage of the dimsightedness of Isaac to impose upon and deceive him. This was her plan: she would dress up Jacob in Esau's clothes, then, inasmuch as the latter was a "hairy man," as he was called, she would place over Jacob's hands and about his wrists and neck the hairy skin of a kid so that the old patriarch, with his failing sight, might not know the difference, and she herself would prepare a tempting dish such as she knew Isaac craved. Then Jacob, thus fitted out, should take the dish to Isaac and present himself for the blessing intended for Esau. Jacob was not at first ready to fall in with the scheme, fearing that it would not succeed, and, failing, he would receive a curse instead of a blessing. This ancestral blessing, by the way, is to be distinguished from the birthright. It was believed anciently that the utterance of a blessing or a curse had a mysterious power in shaping one's future. This was regarded as especially true of the ancestral blessing which was often supposed to carry with it the future of a people or a tribe. Such a blessing, solemnly pronounced, was considered prophetic, and therefore could not be recalled.

Jacob finally yielded to the temptation, went and brought a kid to his mother, allowed her to rig him out in his brother's clothes, and to cover his hands and neck with the hairy skin of the kid. Then, taking the savory meat, he went in to his father. It was, however, with a nervous fear that the deception might be detected. Still, he had committed himself to it

and would do his best to carry out the scheme. When Isaac asked who it was, he said, "I am Esau, thy first-born," a lie to begin with. When asked how it was that he had returned so soon from the chase he impiously replied, "Because the Lord thy God favored me." Isaac was evidently somewhat suspicious and asked him to come near. He would feel of him and in this way determine. After feeling of his hands and his neck he seemed to be satisfied. The voice was like Jacob's but the flesh was like that of Esau. Then he asked him, "Art thou my very son Esau?" and Jacob said, "I am." So, after eating the meat, Isaac pronounced the blessing which really made Jacob the head of the family after him.

So Rebecca gained her heart's desire, but oh, how costly it proved in the end. When Esau returned and understood all he was very angry and came to the terrible determination to kill his brother as soon as his father died, and his death was supposed to be near, although in reality he survived for many years. When the mother heard of Esau's threat she was greatly exercised. If this was carried out her darling would be taken from her. How could she save him? Again she sets her wits to work. He must go away for a time at least, or until the anger of Esau should subside. To bring this about she resorted to another deception. She went to Isaac and proposed that rather than have Jacob marry into some heathen family as Esau had done, he be sent to her brother Laban in Mesopotamia, far to the northeastward, to take a wife there from among his daughters. To this Isaac consented, not knowing the real motive of his wife, and arrangements were made for Jacob's departure.

He had some hard experiences upon the journey, but neither he nor his mother realized that they would never meet again after they separated. It was twenty years before his

return. By deception she had robbed her firstborn of his father's blessing, had led her son Jacob into temptation and sin, and the result of all, unforeseen, was a lifelong separation. She died before his return. Never was sin visited with a more severe temporal penalty. Yet as Jacob goes forth, Isaac bestows upon him once more the blessing already given through a deception—perhaps recognizing the over-ruling hand of God in it in some way, no thanks to the guilty parties. So that as far as his father was concerned, Jacob went in peace.

His route from Beersheba (Map), now the home of Isaac, was probably directly north, first of all, through the central part of the country, as far at least as the great plain of Esdraelon, from which he may have turned off across the Jordan to the northeast. After a few days he arrived at a place known as Bethel, near to which Abraham, his grandfather, had years before erected an altar. The sun had set, he was weary with his journey, and the solitary traveler laid himself down upon the bare ground to rest, with a smooth stone, gathered from the many there, for a pillow, and the star-spangled vault of heaven a canopy over his head.

As he slept a vision came to him. He dreamed that he saw a ladder or stairway reaching from earth to heaven, the Lord above it, and angels ascending and descending upon it. As he gazed a voice fell on his ear, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham and Isaac," and the promise was made that the land on which he lay would be given to him and his descendants, and that in him and his seed all the nations of the earth should be blest, also he would be with Jacob wherever he went and would bring him again to the land. Waking and realizing what had happened, he began to be afraid. "How dreadful is this place," he said. "The Lord was here and I knew it not; this is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven."

Then he proceeded to an act of consecration, setting up the stone he had used for a pillow as a pillar to mark the place, and pouring oil over it to hallow and consecrate it. Then—and this is the most significant part of all—before quitting the spot to go on, he vowed a solemn vow, saying that if God would indeed be with him and pledge to him these great blessings—of caring for and guiding him and bringing him back to safety—he would be his loyal and obedient servant. He would take Him as his God, and worship, trust, adore and love Him.

This may well be viewed as the turning point in Jacob's life. However wayward he had been in the past, mean, unbrotherly, tricky, now he proposes to turn his back upon all, begin again, live a different life. He has received pardon, peace has come, and now, by a different life he will seek to atone for his unworthy past. Not at once would all his old traits disappear, but the radical change had been made. Now the deep purpose of his heart is centered upon God, and from this experience at Bethel he arose a new man. He will still have much of struggle with his old self, may fail often, but deep within, his purpose is fixed. Henceforth he will seek to walk in God's ways.

After his vision at Bethel, Jacob resumes his solitary journey. It will require weary days and weeks before he can complete it. What a time for reflection!—to review his past life, to meditate upon his recent experience, to turn his thoughts to the future. He comes at length to the borders of Mesopotamia. A short distance farther and he will reach his destination. An interesting picture is presented of his introduction to his uncle and his family. Counterparts of the picture are not uncommon in that land today. The customs of the olden times are reproduced. The wells of the country, where water is scarce save in the rainy season, form a gathering place

for the people. These wells are not numerous, but the few which exist are usually well protected, walled about, and the opening covered with a large stone. Here flocks are brought for watering, the shepherds remove the stone, draw water with a leather bucket perhaps, fill the troughs, then when one flock has been served, another comes up, and so, mainly about midday, a large number of herds may be watered. Often young girls tend their fathers' flocks, coming last to the watering. So it was when Jacob came near to his uncle Laban's abode. He entered at once into conversation with the shepherds, asking whence they came and if they knew his uncle. Yes, they were acquainted with him, he dwelt near by, and his younger daughter, Rachel, would soon be there to water the sheep she was tending.

When Rachel came near, Jacob made himself known to her, assisted her in drawing water, and later was taken home by her. He was received into her father Laban's family with cordial heartiness. For an entire month he was regarded as a guest. When the question of a business basis of their relations came up, Laban asked Jacob what wages he would require to remain and assist him in the care of his flocks. Then Jacob, who had already become enamoured of his daughter Rachel, said he would serve seven years if he might then take her to become his wife, for then she would be of marriageable age. In the east it was necessary to buy a wife—or it amounted to about that. As Jacob had no worldly goods to bestow, this was the only way in which he could approach the subject of establishing a home for himself. Laban, who seems to have been a covetous and grasping man, accepted the terms proposed and the bargain was concluded. So Jacob took up his old occupation of tending sheep, not on his own account, but under a man who would prove hard and exacting. And yet the time

seemed to pass quickly, for Jacob was happy. His love for Rachel appears to have been reciprocated. At the end of seven years he was entitled to his wage, and he reminded Laban of their bargain. Laban apparently fell in with the plan and gathered all the men of the place together for a feast, the customary marriage festival, which was kept up for a whole week.

And now the mean and tricky disposition of Laban comes out. It seems that the bride had no particular part in the festivities, but in due time was delivered on an evening to the groom, closely veiled, conducted by her father and female attendants. There were two daughters, Leah the elder, and Rachel the younger whom Jacob loved and for whom he had toiled seven years. But Laban proposed, by a trick, to palm off the elder daughter upon Jacob unbeknown to him. This was possible in the dim light of the evening, torches being few, and the bride closely veiled. It was not until the next morning that Jacob knew of the trick and the cheat. Such cheating and tricky ways are not unknown yet in the East.

Of course Jacob was angry and he reproached Laban bitterly. But Laban had his answer ready. It was not the custom of the country for the younger daughter to be married before the elder, which, if true, he knew beforehand as well as then. He evidently wanted to make sure of disposing of his elder daughter. But to please Jacob, he proposed to let him have Rachel, too, if he would work for her seven years more. Polygamy was not altogether uncommon in those early times. All this disclosed Laban's character, and the fact that he was tricky and that his sister, Rebecca, Jacob's mother, was the same, may account for the same trait in Jacob. Evidently he came honestly by it. It was a family trait. Jacob determined to make the best of the situation and agreed to the

proposal, taking both sisters to form his home, and kept on waiting.

The story of the second seven years' service, and then six years more after that upon another arrangement by means of which Jacob came to have a share in the business and gained rapidly in his possessions, we need not delay to rehearse in full. Suffice it to say that Jacob found, as many a polygamist has found, when the clear design of God in the marriage relation of one man and one woman is ignored, that the plan of plural wives did not work well. It led to domestice infelicity; it occasioned distress all around. Then, too, the business arrangements with Laban were not satisfactory. Jacob had a hard and exacting man to deal with. Finally Jacob felt impelled to break the relationship and return to his own land. As he continued to reflect, it more and more grew upon him that this was the thing to do. His wives fell in with the proposal, for evidently they were not, themselves, satisfied with their father's treatment of the family.

By this time Jacob's flocks had become numerous and were pastured and cared for separately from Laban's at a distance from them of two or three days' journey. His family had become large and no doubt he had many retainers and helpers. Perhaps fearing trouble if he conferred with his father-in-law, he determined to start off quietly, saying nothing about it. Laban was three days to the eastward shearing his sheep. Of course Jacob's progress would be slow. When Laban heard of his departure he determined to pursue. Taking a number of men with him and journeying without incumbrance, they overtook Jacob in a few days on the edge or over the border of Gilead (Map). The interview was not altogether pleasant and might have resulted in harm to Jacob and the forcible seizure of his wives and family, even of his goods, but wiser

counsels finally prevailed. They parted amicably, a covenant having been made between them, and it was agreed that peace should exist. Neither one henceforth should pass beyond a certain boundary. Then Laban and his company departed homeward, and there is no more connection between them or their races or their tribes.

So this danger was passed. Now another possible one looms up. How about Esau? During the twenty or more years of separation he has become the head of a family or tribe of his own, occupying the country of Edom (Map), south of the Dead Sea. How he feels toward Jacob now, the latter knows not. If unfriendly, there is only danger in store. In his anger years before, he had threatened to kill Jacob, and it was this which had led to the latter's flight from home. Esau may have changed in his attitude since then, or he may not. So Jacob sent messengers to him, seeking by conciliatory measures to placate him if he was still disposed to be hostile. After awaiting anxiously their return, they came at length, but brought no definite reassuring message. All that they could report was that Esau was approaching with four hundred armed men. Jacob was greatly alarmed. If his brother was hostile he could not stand against him, and his wives and his children and all that he had were at Esau's mercy.

In this dilemma, Jacob decides what to do, really decides upon three things. First, he will continue his conciliatory measures. He arranges large presents from his flocks for his brother, and sends men at intervals to deliver them. Secondly, he will dispose his family and men in two sections in such a way that if one should be attacked the other might escape. Thirdly, and as his main dependence, he will resort to his God in prayer. They are near the Jabbok river (Map). The family and possessions and men are on the south side. In his

anxiety and distress, he wanted to be absolutely alone with God. And here he prayed—prayed for protection from his brother, prayed all night, agonized, until conscious of a strange presence and he seemed to wrestle with him. The struggle continued until break of day. Jacob prevailed, his prayer was answered, his mind was at rest.

Just what all this means, just how far all was literally true as to wrestling with the angel of God's presence, we may not be able clearly and satisfactorily to know and explain. But the main thing is the praying—Jacob's resorting to God in his distress, and his persistence until he prevailed. Jacob himself recognized that he had been with God, had seen him face to face, at least had struggled with his messenger.

As the morning advanced, Jacob crossed the river and went on ahead of his family and friends. As Esau drew near, Jacob bowed himself seven times to the ground, an act of extreme humility. At the sight of his brother and the manifestation of this spirit, Esau forgot his wrongs, even if he still cherished them, and running forward fell on Jacob's neck, kissed him, and they wept. The past was forgotten, at any rate forgiven. Then followed introductions to Jacob's family, there was complete reconciliation, and an arrangement was finally made by which Esau was to return to his own land and Jacob was to go over the Jordan into Canaan.

And so Jacob came to another turning point in his career. At the first one, twenty years before, he had determined to walk in God's ways; in this one he evidently gave himself in a new and more utter consecration than ever before. He must have done so to have prevailed as he did in his prayers. He had been in danger, great interests were involved, he recognized his helplessness and his dependence. If only God would be his deliverer and bless him, what would he not

promise. His previous life at Haran had been faulty, his old spirit manifesting itself from time to time. But now he makes a new start as it were, and henceforth he walks more closely with God than at any previous period. He has been gaining in character, growing, has made some progress, but this is like a new start or a new consecration entirely. He has been brought by his anxiety and trouble to cast himself on God as never before. It has been a second great turning point.

We may have all come to the first turning point. Do we not need to come to the second?

After this experience at the Jabbok and reconciliation with Esau, Jacob kept on in his journey until he came into central Palestine near to the city of Shechem (Map). Here he pitched his tents and made it his headquarters for a considerable period. Meanwhile his flocks probably found pasturage in the plain or valley to the east of the city. After a time, some serious trouble having arisen between Jacob's sons and the people of the place, he concluded to move on. He came to Bethel a few miles to the southward. This was the place where twenty years before he had had the memorable vision which proved to be his first great turning point in life.

It was a place of sacred memories. He had passed through many vicissitudes and learned many lessons since then, and had become much chastened in spirit. It is not strange, perhaps, that he made this second visit the occasion of a fresh consecration, when God came to him with renewed promises of blessing. The land would sometime belong to his descendants, and divine favor would attend him so long as he continued in the way of obedience.

Now at length he moves on again, and comes into the region of Hebron, where his father, Isaac, now very old, had his baode. On the way he met with another sore trial—the

death of his beloved Rachel. She was buried near Bethlehem, and the place of burial, though by no means certain now, is still pointed out. At Hebron he does all he can to make his father comfortable, but at length he passes away, and the two brothers, Jacob and Esau, are again together. They attend to their father's burial, which was in the cave of Machpelah, where his grandfather Abraham, had been buried, and also Sarah, his wife.

We come now to another notable experience in Jacob's life, which added to his sorrows and no doubt had a distinct influence upon his spiritual life. But as the narrative of his remaining days is closely bound up with the story of his son, Joseph, whose character and career will form the theme of another lecture, we will pass over what remains very briefly. Among Jacob's twelve sons, Joseph, unfortunately, was his favorite, notwithstadning the lesson he should have learned from his own early home life of the sad consequences of the manifestation of favoritism in a family. The story of Joseph is familiar, how he was sent by his father on one occasion to visit his brothers who had gone to the region of Shechem, later to Dothan, to pasture their flocks, to learn how they were getting on; how they conspired against him in their jealousy, finally selling him to a company of Ishmaelites who were passing that way bound to Egypt, reporting to their father that some wild beast must have devoured him, sending him his coat of many colors, which they had themselves saturated with blood, in support of their statements. It was a terrible blow to Jacob, of course. It must have seemed a climax to his sorrows. Joseph was sold as a slave in Egypt. We recall the story of his imprisonment, through no fault of his own, his elevation later to the highest position under the King to prepare for the impending famine. Then his brothers come from Canaan to

buy food. He recognized them although they did not recognize him. Finally after sufficiently testing them to determine what was the manner of their spirit at this time, he made himself known to them, inviting them with their father and their families to remove to Egypt and make their home in Goshen, a section of the country suitable for the shepherding of flocks. There was a glad reunion at length of father and son. After some years Jacob died and his remains were taken to Hebron and buried along with those of Abraham and Isaac.

In closing, we may profitably turn our thoughts to one or two considerations. We have already referred to the notable turning points in Jacob's career—the first at Bethel, the second at the river Jabbok—the one his determination henceforth to be obedient to God and walk in his ways; the other when, in his distress and peril, he was led to give himself in a new consecration to God more utterly and completely than ever before. But the aspect of his experience which may well be emphasized is this—how he was made perfect through suffering, not literally perfect of course, but chastened, purified, more and more made over into the likeness of God—transformed by the inworking of divine grace. He had had a strange career, with many unusual experiences, many severe trials. No doubt, with a quickened conscience after Bethel, he suffered over the recollection of his treatment of his brother and his father. It was hard to be compelled to fly for his life, to bid adieu to his mother Rebecca, whom he never saw again. He suffered in the service of his uncle Laban through his injustice and deception. He suffered intensely from his fear of Esau, and it was this which led to his night of prayer at the Jabbok. He suffered from the conduct of his sons at Shechem, and sorrowed deeply over the death of his beloved Rachel soon after. Finally he was crushed by the loss, by wild beasts as he supposed, of

his dearly loved Joseph. Much of his suffering was doubtless the natural result of his own course, and some of it came in the course of providence for which he was not responsible.

But although he was not always open and honest, was sometimes even mean and tricky, there was this redeeming thing about him, that he certainly did at times make effort to overcome and be different. We see evidences from time to time in his career of a struggle going on within him between the better and nobler elements of his nature and the lower and more unworthy. At times he gathered himself up freshly for a new effort. His trials did much to subdue his spirit, for he seemed to bear them meekly and so they were over-ruled for good to him. When finally he came to his end, the better elements of his nature had triumphed. A noble character had developed, his faith had become strong and enduring, and we have a signal illustration in his case of the transforming power of the grace of God. All this was true thousands of years ago—it is even more true today. Many are the instances which might be cited of those who have been utterly made over in spirit, like Paul, many who have been lifted out of lowest degradation, who have been set free from bondage to appetite and passion, whose great aim in life has been changed from self-seeking, worldly pleasure, earthly glory, to unselfish devotion to the good of their fellowmen and the upbuilding of righteousness and truth. It is the grace of God which brings these things about. Nothing else could do it. This is something which we need constantly to recognize and to emphasize.

Whoever, whatever has been his past record of sin and guilt, whatever his character and disposition today, will open his heart and life to the inworking of this divine grace, may experience this transforming work within himself and in his

life in growing degree. A progressive sanctification is possible to us all if we will. Jacob was made over—so may we be—so may all who open their hearts to receive the free pardon and divine help of a compassionate and just God.

JOSEPH

CHAPTER III

(Map of Canaan, Wilderness, and Egypt)

ONE reason for the abiding charm of patriarchal stories is that their delineations of character are so true to universal human nature. The weaknesses and foibles of these men as well as their noble and manly qualities are depicted just as we find them today. There is no glossing over. Then again great truths are illustrated in the narratives which become object lessons for all time, especially as to the workings of Providence in the lives of individuals and nations. Added to all is the delightful simplicity and naturalness of the stories themselves, with their minute details, their graphic descriptions, and often their thrilling incidents.

Among these narratives that of Joseph is the most touching and instructive and one of the most familiar. If it were a work of the imagination simply it would be said to have a remarkably skillful plot and its author would hold a high place among the successful writers of fiction. As a reality, it is an example, more conspicuous than some, perhaps, of what is true in every consecrated life, the fact of God's shaping and guiding hand in it, his minute providential supervision of it, and all with reference to some high end for temporal or spiritual good or for both. The successive stages of the gradual unfolding of God's plans for us may not be as clearly defined in our own thought and experience as they seem to be in the story, but they are all there just the same, and in the clearer vision of succeeding years they will be seen to stand out more and more distinctly as we

review our experience. In the revealings of eternity, at any rate, all this will be made perfectly plain.

In the case of Joseph, his strange experience had reference not alone to his own future welfare. In his elevation to a conspicuous and influential station in Egypt, it had reference to the future welfare of the entire family of his father in a time of sore need. Nor was this all. Joseph's experience, as it proved, was designed to be a most important link in a chain of deeply significant providential events whose meaning was not then clear, but which was made entirely plain later on in the carrying out of God's great plan of making the descendants of Abraham ultimately the means of blessing to all mankind. It is the larger significance of Joseph's life and experience which it is of special interest to study. In it we see how God, by means of or through events which came about in the ordinary course of things, often carries out his own high ends, and this without at all interfering with individual freedom or responsibility.

When the story opens, Joseph is living with his father, Jacob, whose flocks were numerous and large, at Hebron, which was a region where the soil was fertile and the pasturage excellent. Joseph's birthplace was Mesopotamia, whither Jacob, years before, had fled to escape the anger of his brother Esau, whom he had offended and wronged, and where he had married. At this time Joseph was probably about seventeen years of age, one of the youngest of Jacob's twelve sons and his father's favorite. His mother, Rachel, had been dead for several years. The partiality of Jacob for Joseph was very unwisely manifested, and the natural consequence was the jealousy of the brothers and their alienation from him. This feeling would be intensified by Jacob's giving to Joseph a peculiar dress, termed in our common version "a coat of many colors," but which was in reality a badge of distinction, perhaps a sign that he was the

one selected to receive the birthright by which he would succeed to his father's headship of the clan and be the chief inheritor of his property. The sight of this coat would only embitter his brothers against him the more. Other things came in to aggravate for which Joseph himself was not blameless. His dreams about the future in which his brothers were made to do obeisance to him, and for the telling of which before them his father rebuked him, intensified their dislike. With more wisdom, he would have kept his dream-visions to himself. At length, in their hatred, the brothers were moved to take measures to put him out of their way. An opportunity soon came and it was eagerly embraced.

At a time when the pasturage about Hebron had begun to fail, the brothers went with their flocks to Shechem (Map), a beautiful neighborhood, the valley, a few miles in extent just east of which, was one of the most fertile regions of the country. Here their father had purchased a parcel of ground some years previously, and in it had digged a well. It was here, hundreds of years afterward, that Christ rested and held his conversation on the water of life with the woman of Samaria. The distance of Shechem was about two days' journey north of Hebron. After the brothers had been absent some time, Jacob became anxious to learn how they were getting on, so he concluded to send Joseph to find out. The parting of father and son seemed only a common-place affair, only for a few days seemingly, yet as a matter of fact they did not see each other again for twenty years. The future was mercifully concealed from them. This only illustrates how little we know what a day may bring forth.

Arrived at Shechem, Joseph learned that his brothers had moved on with their flocks to another place of pasturage. He was directed by a stranger where to find them. The place was Dothan (Map), perhaps fifteen miles distant to the northwest.

It has been identified in recent times. It was another fertile valley well suited to pasturage. One of the prominent thoroughfares of that period, connecting the regions east of the Jordan with the Mediterranean coasts and roads leading to Egypt, passed through this valley or plain. Even yet the sight of caravans on this road is not uncommon.

As Joseph entered the valley, coming over a hill, his brothers, who were not very far distant, observed some one coming toward them. Soon they recognized that it was the hated dreamer. Now, thought they, is our opportunity. They were far from home; no one would be the wiser; there would be no one to testify against them. They therefore at first concluded to slay him, cast his body in some pit, then report that some beast had devoured him. They would see what would become of his dreams, they said. One of them, however, Reuben, who seemed to be animated by a more kindly spirit than the rest, proposed that they put him in a pit or well instead of murdering him outright, perhaps a rock-hewn cistern, dry at that time—and such abounded in the country—and leave him to perish. He had a secret purpose of rescuing him. The other brothers fell in with the plan.

So as Joseph came near, all unsuspecting, they seized him, stripped off the hated garment, and thrust him into a large cistern, dark and damp. We can imagine his surprise, his entreaties and cries as he realized the prospect. Meanwhile, as the brothers were eating, a caravan of Ishmaelites on their way from east of the Jordan to Egypt, approached. Then it was suggested by one of the brothers that they sell Joseph; that thus they would avoid responsibility for his death, and yet get rid of him, and realize some profit at the same time. The proposition was made to the merchants and accepted. The price agreed upon was twenty pieces of silver, about fifteen dollars, and the

caravan proceeded on its way. Reuben, returning, was grievously disappointed at not finding Joseph in the pit and rent his clothes in his grief. The others, feeling it to be necessary to give some account to the father of Joseph's disappearance, took the exasperating coat, dipped it in the blood of a goat and took it to their father, saying that they had found it but knew not whether it was Joseph's coat or not, thus adding lying to their other sins. The effect upon the old father was most distressing. Their story was well confirmed and he refused to be comforted.

As for Joseph, we may imagine his feelings as he was borne away, far, far from home to the land of Egypt. But although he knew it not—and no thanks to the brothers who were guilty just the same—he was really going to Egypt on a great providential mission in the carrying out of God's plans.

Reaching Egypt at length, Joseph was sold as a slave by the Ishmaelites to a man of prominence named Potiphar, who made him one of his household servants. Joseph accepted his hard lot with cheerfulness and patience, resolved to make the best of the situation, and his conduct so commended itself to his master that larger and larger responsibilities were laid upon him until at last he was made master of the household. In this position he continued for a number of years. Then came to him a terrible trial—a temptation before which he might have fallen but for the high principle in him. Potiphar's wife sought to make him a partner with her in a guilty intrigue involving her own disloyalty to her husband. When Joseph refused to be drawn into the scheme, his mistress resolved, since she could not control him, to ruin him. So she went to her husband with a cunningly devised story in which she cast all the blame upon Joseph. Potiphar was so angered that without stopping to investigate or give Joseph the slightest opportunity to explain or

defend himself—forgetting his high character for years—he thrust him into prison. Here at length, by his manly bearing, he became the trusted servant of the keeper, and to him was committed the care of all the other prisoners. He had remained silent under the false accusation, leaving it to God to vindicate him in due time.

Among the prisoners assigned to Joseph's supervision were two officers of the court, the chief butler and the chief baker, whose positions were of high dignity. The nature of their crimes is not indicated but they must have been very grave. The men were in such suspense as to their fate that it influenced their dreams. One morning as Joseph met them, their anxious faces showed that they were greatly troubled. He inquired the cause. They told him. Thereupon he offered to interpret their dreams which had so disturbed them—not that he had power in himself to do so, but that God would make known to him the meaning. So he explained the dreams. Within three days the chief butler would be restored to office, and Joseph made the request that when at liberty he would intercede with the King in his, Joseph's, behalf. The dream of the chief cook meant that within a few days he would suffer the penalty of death for his offense. Both these interpretations came true. In three days both men left the prison, one to resume his position in the palace, the other to be hung. Joseph, no doubt homesick and heartsick, remained in prison. The ungrateful butler, in his liberty, forgot all about him. For full two years longer he continued in prison, but God had not forgotten him even if the butler had. Circumstances came about in God's providence at length which brought him not only his liberty but a most unexpected exaltation.

One day he was summoned before the King, who had dreamed two dreams of so peculiar a sort that his mind was

filled with apprehension—they seemed in some way to involve the welfare of the land. In the first he saw seven cows coming up out of the Nile in splendid condition. After that seven others, lean, came up out of the water and actually ate up the others. In the second dream he saw seven ears of corn, large and full-grained, which were devoured by seven thin and blasted ones. None of the magicians could explain the dreams. Then the chief butler recalled how Joseph had interpreted his own perplexing dream. He told the King about it and how all came to pass just as Joseph had said. So Joseph was sent for. Pharaoh stated the case and asked if he could explain the dreams. As before Joseph referred all to God who would give him the interpretation. Then he explained that both dreams meant the same thing. The country was about to enjoy seven good years with abundant crops. These would be followed by seven years of great scarcity amounting to actual famine. He then advised that measures be taken to provide against the danger, suggesting that a portion of the produce of the land be stored up against that period in granaries all over the country. The place of one of these granaries, it is believed, has recently been identified. There was so much practical wisdom in this advice and so much executive ability manifested in the plans proposed, that Pharaoh concluded that Joseph was just the man to be placed in charge of the whole business, so then and there he appointed him to the great responsibility, elevating him to a position second only to his own. Everywhere he caused proclamation to be made to this effect, and various honors were accorded to Joseph. Then he was installed in his exalted station. Seventeen years before, out of the envy and hate of his brothers, he had been sold into slavery. Now he had reached the position foreshadowed by his early dreams.

The first thing which Joseph did was to make a tour of the land and arrange for the erection of great storehouses in all the cities. The crops during the seven years were exceedingly abundant. Of these he either bought or took one-fifth to be stored. But when the years of scarcity began—for the terrible famine came at last as Joseph had said—the face of things was changed. Although warned of what was coming, the people became negligent and little provision against the approach of famine was made. As a consequence their available resources were soon exhausted and they were obliged to buy food of the government. This continued until they had exhausted their money, later their cattle, and later still their lands. Joseph did all he could to relieve the situation, and they were spared many of the horrors which usually attend famines.

But the famine was not confined to Egypt alone. It extended to some of the neighboring countries, and the consequence was that there was a general flocking from various directions to the land of the Nile to purchase food. Among others the land of Canaan was afflicted. Canaan seems to have been subject to periods of famine. Such was the case soon after Abraham came into the country. There was a famine also in the time of Isaac, and now in Jacob's time there is another, and he was among the many who at this time sent down into Egypt to procure supplies. He still resided at Hebron (Map). He sent his ten sons on this errand, retaining Benjamin, the youngest, at home. Now that Joseph had gone, Benjamin had taken his place in his father's affections.

No doubt they followed the well-known route along the low coast regions. Probably they journeyed for a week along this desert route, which was without streams or verdure of any kind. Reaching their destination, they were ushered into the presence of the high official of the country who had charge of all this

business. For while Joseph did not personally attend to supplying the people of Egypt with grain, it would appear that all applicants from other lands were required to make their requests of him directly. When he saw this company of ten shepherds he knew them in a moment, but they did not recognize him, which is not strange, perhaps. He must have changed much since his boyhood days, and they could not have anticipated seeing him in this position. But although he recognized them, he did not let them know it. He could understand their speech, but he spoke to them through an interpreter as he was accustomed to do with other foreigners. Before he would make himself known to them, he deemed it prudent to test them to determine what their spirit was—whether they were hard and unrelenting as of old, or softened and subdued by the lapse of years and by reflection upon their wicked course.

As the brothers entered Joseph's presence, they bowed themselves with their faces to the earth, thus unconsciously fulfilling his early dreams. Joseph evidently had no definite plan in mind for testing his brothers. He resolved, however, to act a part toward them which might bring their sins to remembrance. He asked them through the interpreter whence they came, and receiving answer that they were from the land of Canaan to buy food, he abruptly and sternly accused them of having come as spies to learn of the defenseless character of Egypt's northeast boundary, hoping to carry back such report as might lead the Canaanites to make an invasion at a time when the people were suffering privation from famine. They repelled the charge indignantly and explained that their mission was simply one of family necessity. They were twelve brothers, they said, but one was not, and the youngest was with their father. What emotions must have welled up in Joseph's heart as they rehearsed the story with which he was himself even more

familiar, and he learned that his aged father was still alive and that all was well with his younger brother, Benjamin. Then in the same stern tones he directed that one of their number be deputed to go forth and fetch their brother, and that all the rest be imprisoned meanwhile in order to prove their words—otherwise they would be regarded as spies and would be treated accordingly They were thrown into prison for three days, after which nine of them were permitted to return with food to supply their homes, while Joseph kept one of them bound in prison as a pledge that they would come again bringing their younger brother. The story is so familiar that it seems almost needless to rehearse it further than to note its successive steps leading up to the family reunion in which it culminates. Still, we must touch upon a number of details.

At the first stopping place the brothers discovered that their money had been returned in one of their sacks. This alarmed them by a suspicion that they were the victims of some conspiracy. The fear was intensified upon their arrival at home when they learned that it was the same in each sack—the money which had been paid for it was returned. Jacob was especially sorrow stricken when he heard the story of their experiences in Egypt, and of how they had been compelled to leave Simeon whose liberty could only be secured by their taking Benjamin with them when next they went to buy food. As he thought of his long-lost Joseph he declared that his youngest son should not go down. If mischief should befall him, he said, it would bring down his father's gray hairs in sorrow to the grave.

When, however, the pressure of famine was again upon them, Jacob was constrained, under the earnest pleading of his sons and the promise of one of them to be responsible for his safe return, to let Benjamin go with them on the second journey. But while Jacob had his anxieties during the absence of his sons,

they themselves were by no means free from them. As they journeyed along they had time for reflection. How would they find Simeon—what treatment would he have received, especially in view of the fact, which could have been no mere accident, in regard to the return of the money they had paid for the grain before, although they were ready to pay double if necessary? So, filled with these anxious questionings they arrived in Egypt at length and again made application at the public storehouse for grain. Joseph met them and arranged to have all dine with him at his house. They were perplexed at this and apprehensive, but there was nothing for them to do but to go. As they came before Joseph they bowed themselves as before. He inquired tenderly as to the health of their father, welcomed Benjamin heartily, and then hastened to his chamber to hide the tears which he could no longer restrain. Returning to them he began the testing ordeal to which, all unknown to them, he designed to subject them. For one thing he clearly indicated his preference for Benjamin, giving special honor to him, but it led to no manifestation of jealousy, which was a favorable sign. The feast was one of harmonious gladness throughout.

Starting homeward next morning they had hardly reached the outskirts of the city before they were overtaken by the steward, who accused them of having stolen a valuable cup. Conscious of their innocence they stoutly denied the charge, when, to their dismay, the cup was found in Benjamin's sack—for the steward had himself put it there at Joseph's command for a purpose. Then they all returned to Joseph's home, unwilling that Benjamin should be taken back alone. When Joseph upbraided them for this ingratitude, Judah, one of the brothers, stepped forth and made a most tender and touching yet manly plea in behalf of his brother, referring to the aged father and his concern for his son, and how it had only been with

the greatest difficulty that they had secured his consent to let Benjamin accompany them, stating that he himself had become surety for the lad and proposed to remain in bondage in his stead if only his younger brother might be allowed to return to their father.

Joseph's heart was moved to the depths. Now he had convincing proof that they were not only sorry for the past but were so changed that they might be safely trusted for the future. He, therefore, resolved to make himself known to them, and did so. Rehearsing his experiences more in detail, he inquired more particularly as to their father, and when he saw that they were troubled lest he should punish them now that he had them in his power, he said to them—and this is one of the great lessons of the story—that although they had thought evil against him, God had meant it unto good, had over-ruled it to that end, had sent him before them to preserve life. Then he bade them hasten to their father and make all known to him, also to bid him to come down and dwell on a portion of land to be specially set apart for him and for all of them and their flocks. Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept with him. Moreover, he blessed all his brothers and wept upon them, and after that his brothers talked with him and the reconciliation was complete. Joseph forgave them freely and the hearts of all were filled with joy.

The return of the eleven brothers from Egypt was made with speed and safety. They were eager to relieve the father's anxiety as well as to bring him the food they had procured. We can imagine the scene after the first greetings were over, when they told him the marvelous news that Joseph was alive, that he was the governor with whom they had been dealing, and how he wished them all to come down with all their possessions and dwell in Egypt. Naturally Jacob was at first in-

credulous, but to convince him they repeated not only all that Joseph had told them, but also showed him the wagons and presents of Pharaoh which Joseph had sent by them. He could not gainsay such evidence as this. Now he was convinced and his spirit revived. In a burst of gratitude and faith he said: "It is enough. Joseph, my son, is yet alive, I will go and see him before I die."

It was a momentous resolution, a great undertaking to make such a move considering the numbers connected with all their families and retainers, to say nothing of their extensive herds. Still, this was the only way by which Jacob could see his long-lost son, for of course Joseph could not be spared at this time to visit his father. And now there is the bustle of preparation all through the camp. Finally everything is ready and they set forth. It must have been a strange sight—the white-haired and bearded patriarch resting or reclining in the best of Pharaoh's wagons, daughters-in-law and children in other wagons, and a body-guard about them of sons and sons-in-law and others, all armed with such weapons as they could command; then all the attendants and their families, then all their possessions, various flocks, some of the animals, no doubt, laden with water-skins for the desert.

Proceeding southward from Hebron, the point of starting, they would first come to Beersheba on the verge of the desert. From here the route is uncertain. Very likely they went in a southwesterly direction into the desert, and then on to the Egyptian frontier. At length the long journey was accomplished. The land of Goshen, the portion of Egypt on the northeast which was to be their abiding place, was reached. Next to their own land it was the most suitable for their flocks and herds. Here Joseph came to meet his father. What a meeting it must have been after their long separation! What memo-

ries must have been awakened, and through all the good providence of God directing their ways.

Then Joseph, having prepared Pharaoh for the interview, took his father and five of his brothers—the rest of the brothers remaining in charge of the flocks—and went to the Egyptian court, where they received a cordial welcome and were formally assigned to Goshen. After some conversation, Jacob was taken back to Goshen, where he lived for seventeen years, or until his death. No events of importance are recorded for that period. His closing days were peaceful. It was his request to Joseph that he might be buried in the cave of Machpelah in Hebron, and Joseph promised him accordingly.

Jacob's last interview with Joseph was interesting. He pronounced a blessing upon Joseph's two sons and assured them that in due time God would bring them to the land of their fathers. Then he gathered his twelve sons about him and uttered the name of each in turn, touching on his past and giving intimation of his future. The sons would never forget the experience. After this, he calmly yielded up the ghost. Joseph fell upon his father's neck and wept.

After this Joseph saw to it that his father's wishes were carried out in regard to his burial. First the body was embalmed, then after a period of mourning it was taken to Canaan and laid away in the cave of Machpelah as requested. It must have been a grand funeral procession, with not only Jacob's family but many prominent Egyptian officials in it also—the journey requiring several days. Jacob's career had been a peculiar one. His early traits of character were such as required long and severe discipline, but he came down to a ripe old age with abounding trust in God, a monument of what the grace of God is able to accomplish in the hearts and lives of those who are open to its transforming power.

Finally Joseph himself passed away, but not before he had again assured his brethren of his full forgiveness and of his interpretation of God's purpose in his case, meaning all unto good, although at the time they had thought evil against him. It was not only to provide for their temporal needs growing out of the famine, but to bring the family into Egypt for further preparation and discipline with reference to God's ultimate purpose of giving them the land of Canaan. Joseph assured them of his conviction that God would eventually lead them back, and then took an oath from them that they would carry up his bones when they went. So he died and they embalmed him and put him in a coffin in Egypt. Many years later, when Israel went, his body was taken and finally deposited near Shechem in the parcel of ground which his father had long before purchased.

The story of Joseph suggests many lessons on which it would be profitable to dwell, one of which is his loyal devotion to his father, so beautifully shown to the very end of his life. He was his father's favorite, which it was certainly unwise on the part of Jacob to manifest and to let it influence him. Still, there was doubtless something very winsome in his disposition, and not even his great success and honor interfered in the least with his filial devotion.

Then there was his forgiving spirit. Although so wronged by his heartless, jealous brothers that his early life was blighted, and there were years of separation from his father, he did not retain any grudge as he might have done and gained revenge at length when they were in his power. No—his was a forgiving spirit, sweet, gentle, beautiful to contemplate.

There was his constant sense of God's presence with him. God was not afar off to him and no trouble or persecution could keep him from realizing God's nearness—rather it intensified

his sense of it. No prosperity could blind him to the fact that he owed all his advancement to God. The Lord was round about him, and whatever men might devise against him, he knew, such was his faith, that God meant it all unto good in some way, whether it was clear at the time or not. This it was which gave him courage, confidence, support in trouble, and in all the lonesomeness which he must have experienced.

But the one great lesson of the story is the providence of God in the most minute of human affairs and all for the highest ends, even to the over-ruling of seeming evil for good to such as trust in Him. We often have the idea that Providence has to do with great things only, great events, great crises, great men, or if it relates to our lives at all, only to some of their more important phases. But the Biblical view is that it has to do with all events, with all God's children, with the humble as well as the great, and that it is in operation at all times, as well as at the more striking junctures. God is interested in every life, has a place and a plan for it, and not only for the highest good of one's own life, but this personal plan may be related to some larger plan not clear to us, as the plan of Joseph's life was related to God's larger plans for his whole people. The thought is a grand and inspiring one.

MOSES

CHAPTER IV

(Map of Egypt and the Wilderness)

IT is not altogether clear how long the family of Jacob and his descendants remained in Egypt. It may have been two or three centuries, or even more. For the greater part of this period the history is a complete blank. Naturally, while Joseph lived, the people would be unmolested. After his death they might be regarded with less consideration. As an alien race within the borders of Egypt, rapidly multiplying and prosperous, they might come to be regarded as a menace to the security of the nation. In case the sympathy of the Israelites should be with an enemy, it would place Egypt at an immense disadvantage. Such a calamity came at length to be feared. To prevent such a possible danger, the first step was to deprive the Israelites of their freedom. So they were impressed into the public service, their main employment being the construction of public buildings and the making of bricks. They groaned under hard task-masters, we read, and their cries went up to heaven. The object of this oppression was both to crush their spirits and to reduce their numbers. This period of servitude continued for a long time prior to the birth of Moses. As the severe measures of the government failed of their purpose, an order was issued for the destruction of all male infants born among the Hebrews. This order was boldly disobeyed in many instances. One of the children thus threatened was Moses. The story of how his parents sought to save him by concealing him for three months and then putting him in a little

ark or basket covered with pitch, placed among the bulrushes at the edge of the river, and of how here he was found and cared for by a daughter of the King, is familiar, as is the fact that without realizing the relationship, the princess employed the child's own mother to nurse and care for it during its early years. Thus the future deliverer of his people was instructed by his own parents in the history of his race, in their religion, and in the expectation that some day God would set them free. His early education was most likely conducted at the court under a tutor or tutors. Later he would be sent to one of the two great universities of the country. Otherwise he would hardly have been "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" as is declared in Acts 7: 22.

But amid all these Egyptian surroundings and opportunities for advancement, Moses seems never to have forgotten that he was a Hebrew, or the religious training of his childhood. A time came at length when he felt constrained to acquaint himself with the condition of his countrymen, so he made a tour of inspection. Often must his spirit have boiled within him as he saw the cruelties to which they were subjected. Perhaps then or later the incident occurred in which he slew one of the task-masters for this very reason. Moses had evidently determined to cast in his lot with his countrymen, perhaps to take the leadership in a movement for their liberation, but his hasty act in killing this overseer was not concealed, as he supposed. A report of it soon made its way to the King. It was a most serious offense against the law and of course could not be passed by. Hence, to escape the consequence of his act, Moses fled. The only practical direction for him to take was to the eastward. This brought him in due time to the land of Midian (Map), a numerous and prosperous people of the same general stock as Israel. He was kindly re-

ceived by Jethro, the head of the tribe, a daughter of whom he afterward married. He then took up the occupation of this people of shepherding, moving about with them into different parts of the Sinaitic peninsula for pasturage. In this way he gained a knowledge of the country which was afterward invaluable to him.

And here in the wilderness he continued to reside for forty years. Though possibly to one of his temperament these may have seemed years of inactivity, and irksome, they were by no means lost. He was all the time undergoing a spiritual preparation for the great work which he was afterwards to do, althought he may not have realized it. His occupation would be conducive to reflection upon God and divine things. A long period of solitude is often of the highest value for the formation of a high, noble and commanding personality. So with Elijah in Gilead, later, John the Baptist in his ascetic life in the Judean wilderness, Paul in Arabia.

At length a definite call came to him at the burning bush to return to Egypt and attempt to liberate his people. He hesitated, endeavored to evade the responsibility. If forty years before he had been eager and rash, now he shrank and sought to be excused. His objections were all answered, however, and Aaron, his brother, was to be associated with and to assist him. Meanwhile the children of Israel continued to suffer oppression and to cry for deliverance. They little realized that at that very time God had one in training who was now ready for the great task. It is often so, still.

So Moses, taking leave of family and friends, turned his steps toward Egypt again. The incident is mentioned of his meeting his brother Aaron on the way coming to see him. What a meeting it must have been—how much there was to talk about, especially the new project to which both were called.

In all this we see clearly illustrated the minute providence of God in preparing his servant for the great work awaiting him. There were many links in the chain of events by which the preparation was brought about, from the story of his infancy and preservation, his education at the court, his discipline in the wilderness—none of them failed. The various providences in his life, as in the lives of all of us, meant far more than was recognized at the time.

The story of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, their wanderings in the wilderness, and then the conquest of Canaan and settlement there at last, is a wonderfully interesting one. It is the story of the making of a nation.

First as to the exodus, the breaking away of the enslaved Israelites from their bondage. Arrived in Egypt, Moses and Aaron went directly to their brethren in Goshen. They assembled the Elders, i. e. the hereditary heads of families, and explained to them their errand. It was necessary that they be recognized in their mission and assured of co-operation before any steps could be taken to gain Pharaoh's permission for their departure. It must have been a great meeting, the men coming from all over the land of Goshen. They were reminded of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, their ancestors, of one day possessing Canaan, also that God had heard their prayers in their present distress and that now the time had come for their deliverance. The King might not give his consent until after some chastisement, but in due time his consent would be obtained. The Elders were satisfied with the representations made by Moses and returned to their homes to report to the people the new hopes now opening to them.

At length the two brothers went in before Pharaoh. After the usual formalities of presentation, they made their request in the name of Jehovah, Aaron acting as spokesman. Pharaoh

proudly refused to let their people go even for a three days' journey into the wilderness for religious purposes. The God of the Hebrews was nothing to him—he did not recognize either Him or his authority; furthermore he needed the labors of the Israelites and would not have such labors interrupted. Thereupon, after a solemn warning as to the chastisement which would follow his persistent refusal, the brothers withdrew. Their failure was only what could have been anticipated and probably was, and the only result was the laying of even heavier burdens on the Hebrew toilers.

Later, the brothers appeared a second time before the King, this time authorized, if necessary, to display miraculous powers to convince him of their divine commission. But the second appeal was as fruitless as the first. Again the King refused, hardening his heart, shutting his eyes against the light, bringing down upon himself and his people the first of the calamitous series of plagues necessary to compel an unwilling consent on his part to let the Hebrews go.

The matter of the plagues—the word meaning literally a blow or stroke from God's hand—has always been invested with more or less difficulty. Some have endeavored to explain them on naturalistic grounds alone—others would make them entirely supernatural. It is possible that if we were thoroughly familiar with the country, the people, and the general situation at the time, much light would be thrown on the character of these plagues and some of the difficulties be relieved. One writer declares that it is not impossible that none of the visitations was of a character absolutely unknown to the people. They all represented experiences which were natural, but rare, or commonly insignificant. What turns them into plagues, this writer continues, was their unexampled severity and their universality. We shall not assume to settle the ques-

tions involved. Both natural and supernatural elements seem to have been present—it may not be possible clearly to draw the line between the two. The essential thing for the narrative is the fact of the plagues or "strokes", not the explanation or the philosophy of them. The latter might be interesting could we be confident in regard to it.

We cannot dwell upon the plagues in detail. They were of a climactic character, each rising above that which went before it, adding new elements of terror, until the culmination was reached in the death of the first-born in every Egyptian home. More than once Pharaoh begged the brothers to intercede with their God to desist, but no sooner was there a respite than he forgot or ignored his promise to let the Hebrews go. After the last plague, however, he made a definite and final promise, and the enslaved people made their preparations accordingly. They arranged for a hasty festival, a passover feast before starting, this to be observed periodically afterward in commemoration of their deliverance.

At last, after all their ordeals, word was given to start. From their rallying point at Succoth in Goshen, they advanced to Ethan on the edge of the wilderness, an uninhabited district near the head of the Gulf of Suez. From the north end of this gulf a chain of forts, probably connected by strong walls, had been constructed, extending to the Mediterranean, to keep out the nomadic tribes of the Arabian desert. There were three passageways through this wall, whence issued three great routes to the eastward, one at each end and one in the middle. The southernmost passageway or route was chosen by the fleeing Israelites, but as they came to it they found it closed against them. This left them in an exposed position, with the desert behind, the gulf in front, and an impassable mountain to the south. When Pharaoh learned of this situation, he re-

pented, we read, that he had let the Israelites go, and concluded that now was his opportunity, so he sent his army to cut them off. As the Israelites saw the approaching chariots they were sore afraid, and in their distress they upbraided Moses for having brought them forth to perish, but, firm in his faith and unmindful of their unreasonableness, he bade them calmly to wait and they would see the salvation of God. Then as he prayed the word came to him "Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward."

That night a strong east wind blew over the sea, the narrow arm of the gulf, and its waters, shallow at that point, were driven back and their bed was exposed. Now a way of escape was open and the whole people crossed safely to the other side. When the Egyptians set out in pursuit the wind fell, the waters flowed back, and Pharaoh's host was overwhelmed. It had been a wonderful deliverance—the Israelites had realized the salvation of the Lord as Moses had assured them, and their rejoicing expressed itself in a magnificent song of victory, called the Song of Moses, which was chanted by the whole people. It was really the birthday of the nation, and for centuries thereafter it was so regarded and so celebrated. When God says "Go forward" it is for His people to obey; it is for Him to open the way, and He will.

The distance to the Sinaitic group of mountains (Map), including the windings of the way, was about one hundred and fifty miles, but the progress of so large a body of men, women and children, with their flocks and herds was necessarily slow. Not until the third month after starting did they reach the place which became the head center of their encampment for a year thereafter. Meanwhile the people passed through various vicissitudes, during which their need of discipline, of patience, and the cultivation of a spirit of trust in the living God became

increasingly apparent. They were like children, impulsive, short-sighted, now exultant, now cast down, even at times full of murmuring against their faithful leader. Moses bore all patiently however, sustained by the conviction that God was with him and by repeated answers to his prayers.

The route followed may have been the one still used by caravans between Cairo and Suez, and Mount Sinai. Recently some have urged that the route was across the country eastward to the regions of Midian and the mountains there. This view, however, is not widely received as yet, and it seems wiser in the circumstances to follow the belief long held which locates Mount Sinai in the southern central part of the country, and regarding that as the place of the sojourn of the Israelites for an entire year. As they journeyed, they found desert plains to cross and narrow defiles to pass through. At one time they were oppressed by thirst, no water to be had; at another the food supply failed. But in all these seasons of trouble Moses interceded with God for relief and never in vain. He was directed what to do to insure a water supply, and quails in abundance and manna were provided to satisfy their hunger. Thus they slowly journeyed, pitching their camps at one point and another. At Rephidim, the Amalekites, a warlike tribe and the leading one in the Sinaitic region, attacked them, determined to resist their advance. Thereupon Moses, selecting Joshua to command, sent out a body of picked men to meet them. After a fierce contest the Amalekites were defeated and so thoroughly that they did not attempt to molest the Israelites further.

Another incident was the visit to the camp of Jethro, head of the Midianitish tribe with which Moses had lived and his father-in-law. This visit was especially important for the wise counsels which Jethro gave to Moses in regard to a division of

his responsibilities, and which Moses followed, greatly to his relief.

At length the Israelites are at the foot of Sinai, a group of mountains, bold, lofty and bare in appearance, located in the south-central part of the peninsula which is, itself, a high table-land lying between the two northern arms of the Red Sea. The place fixed for the encampment is described as "before the Mount." The identification of this peak among those surrounding is an interesting problem, for, from it the law was given. The concensus of opinion of those who have explored the region is that the granite rock known as Ras Sufsafeh is the one. It is separated from the rest of the range and rises like a huge altar fifteen hundred feet above the general level of the country about it, which is itself four thousand feet above the sea. It is visible from every part of the plain or valley at its base on the northwest side—two miles long by half a mile wide, large enough for the tents of a great multitude. All the surroundings seem to harmonize with the scripture narrative. It is not impossible that Moses may have selected this place for the Israelitish encampment before he returned to Egypt. No fitter place could have been chosen for the great events about to take place.

The stay of the Israelites here was about one year. It was a year of preparation, of instruction, of organizing the people into a nation. Their unstable trust in God was to be guided and trained. They were to be taught in regard to Him and their duty of obedience to Him. Many things of interest occurred, but the thing of chiefest importance was the giving of the law, the Ten Commandments, whose tables constitute the fundamental laws of human society and of the Kingdom of God. It is represented as having been proclaimed in circumstances calculated profoundly to impress the people with the

majesty, authority and power of the Most High. As set forth by the sacred writer, the scenes connected with the giving of the law were inexpressibly grand. The peaks of Sinai were veiled in thick clouds—the lightnings quivered and the thunders resounded. The people were greatly awed. In the midst of all, we read, the Ten Commandments were given. They were in two parts, first, duties to God, second, duties of men to each other. It would seem as if, in the circumstances, Israel could never forget these Commandments, yet it was only a little while after, while Moses was still in the mountain communing with God, that the people erected a golden calf and began to worship it. They wanted some tangible object to bow down to as they had seen in Egypt. Moses was extremely indignant when he again appeared upon the scene and saw what was going on. He sternly rebuked the people, including Aaron who had not prevented the false worship. But the Hebrews were only children at best, in moral things, and it required a long time for them to become established in better ways.

And yet the law was not complete—it was mostly negative, though it was about all that they at that time could appreciate. The positive side was reserved for a later period when Christ came. He completed it in what is sometimes called the eleventh Commandment, or law of love, fulfilling, or filling out the law. The two tables are summed up in love—"To love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself." With the heart full of love, one will want to keep the Commandments, both the positive and the negative—the whole law.

The year at Sinai was one of great events—civil or ceremonial laws given, or begun, to be added to later; the Tabernacle built, and the Ark which was to be placed within its Holy of Holies; the instruction of the people, no doubt carried on

constantly; and their more perfect organization established. All these things completed, the people were prepared again to take up their journey. Now it was to be in the direction of Kadesh Barnea, the exact location of which is not altogether certain, but is supposed to have been situated about fifty miles south of Hebron in the midst of a fertile section in the general desert region. In a direct line it was less than two hundred miles from Sinai.

We can picture the scene of the setting out. The several tribes have been assigned to their positions. The Levites or Tabernacle Guard take charge of that and all its furnishings, occupying the center of the column. The journey must have been slow and trying. It was through desert wastes, narrow gorges,and among a tangle of mountains in that section. Few incidents are recorded, yet enough to show that the old spirit of discontent and murmuring was not yet extinct. Reaching Kadesh Barnea at length, Moses set up what he supposed would be temporary headquarters, but which proved to be a rallying point for a large part of their wilderness life.

As preliminary to the proposed invasion, Moses sent out twelve spies to go up and down the land of Canaan and report as to the country, the people, their strength and the like. The spies were gone six weeks. They went through the land, one account says as far as Mount Hermon. They were not unanimous in their report. They were agreed as to the main facts, such as the fertility of the soil, the desirableness of the land, yet the difficulty of taking possession, the strong cities, the high walls, the giants in some parts; but they disagreed as to their inference from the facts. Ten of the twelve made a majority report. They said that the proposed invasion was impracticable, would result only in disaster if

attempted, Israel would certainly be overwhelmed, and they could never succeed.

The remaining two, Caleb and Joshua, while not overlooking the obstacles, were yet men of faith. They looked over and beyond them—the walled cities, the giants—and saw the mightier forces of the Lord and all His resources of help and support which were available to them. So strong was their confidence that they said, "Let us go up at once and possess the land, for with the help of God we are well able to do it." More than this, they had discovered that the Canaanites were already full of apprehension and fear. God's dealings with the Hebrews and their deliverances were not unknown to them, and their spirit was weak in consequence. In view of all this, now was the time for a bold forward movement, trusting in God, and success was sure.

It was a crisis in Israel's history—the opportunity for which they had longed was now before them. Will they rise to it? Alas, they miserably failed, and the heart of their leader was doomed to disappointment. After hearing the report of the ten, the people lost all heart, were filled with fear, became panic-stricken, and the brave words of Caleb and Joshua had no effect to counteract or overcome their depression. In the panic which prevailed it was even proposed to elect a new leader and return to Egypt. Better suffer there, they said, than die here in the wilderness. Nothing remained, therefore, but for the leaders to turn the faces of the people toward the wilderness again and wait until their faith and courage should be adequate to the task. So now, for thirty-eight years more, their life is there and their history is almost a blank. They lived like other tribes, moving about from place to place according to pasturage for their flocks. Until a hardier faith and

quality of character should prevail, they could not hope to wrest the promised land from the Canaanites.

We know very little of the history of Israel during the wilderness sojourn. Few particulars are preserved—only episodes, now and then. Life must have been monotonous in the extreme. The region embraced is supposed to have been the eastern part of the peninsula in the vicinity or to the southeast of Kadesh Barnea. I used to think of the Israelites as being constantly on the move, marching every day, camping every night, and keeping this up all the years of their wanderings. Such impressions are often given to children. The truth probably was that the tribes were spread out over an area of territory miles in extent where pasturage was to be found. Very likely the Tabernacle was set up at some central point. From time to time it would be moved as the whole body moved. Seventeen stations are mentioned where the ark rested for a season. The location of these stations is now mostly conjectural. The life of the Hebrews was essentially nomadic. In some places they may have harvested grain. Sometimes there were disputes among them and these had to be settled. Sometimes there were violations of law and these had to be punished. Sometimes new laws were made. Once there was an outbreak of rebellion followed by severe punishment of the leaders.

For more than a generation they continued to dwell in tents. Now they were near the sea, the eastern arm, now in the interior of the country. Through all, the disciplinary process went forward. At length they became strong and vigorous, with a national spirit and a robust faith. Deep impressions had been produced by the experiences through which they had passed. Finally they were ready to rally again with reference to an invasion of the promised land.

They came again to Kadesh Barnea from which place they had been turned back thirty-eight years before. This time the attempt for the conquest of Canaan was to be made on the east side of the country, which was the more vulnerable part as compared with the south which was more exposed to attack and better prepared for defence. First of all, permission is sought from the King of Edom to pass through his dominions around the south border of the Dead Sea to a proposed rendezvous east of the Jordan. Permission being refused the Israelites were compelled to make a long detour around Edom or fight—the latter they did not wish to do. Coming to Mount Hor, the high priest Aaron, Moses' brother and close associate, passes away. His sister, Miriam, had died some time before, After thirty days of mourning the camp moved forward. It was in this part of their route that they were bitten by the fiery serpents and the remedy was provided by Moses in the brazen serpent. Crossing the brook Zered, Edom and the desert were left behind. Ere long they reached the chasm of the Arnon river which flows into the Dead Sea from the east. From this time forward they were to encounter opposition. Permission was sought of various hostile tribes, one after another, to pass through their territory. In every case the request was refused, so entrance into the land of Promise could only be by preliminary warfare. Everywhere the results were favorable to the Israelites. Joshua was presumably their military leader. The whole country between the Arnon and Jabbok rivers (Map), was brought under Israelitish control. Then an expedition was sent against Og, King of Bashan, north of the Jabbok, and his country too was overcome. Finally the entire trans-Jordanic region came under their sway. The plain of Moab, just north of the Dead Sea and east of the Jordan, became their headquarters. Here, in full view of the Promised Land, the

Israelites remained for a considerable time and deliberately made preparations for the invasion.

It was here that the incidents of the Book of Deuteronomy are represented as having taken place. Moses realized that his work was about finished. He had received the command of God to give the last charge to the people, to arrange for his successor, and to ascend the mountain near by, from which to gain a view over the land of Promise and where was to be his final resting place. First of all he assembled the leaders and sought to impress the necessity, if they would enjoy the favor of God and avert His terrible judgments, to cleave closely to Jehovah and faithfully to obey him. This he did by a series of addresses, which seem to have been given at intervals, and recorded in the first thirty chapters of Deuteronomy.

Moses' next care was to select his successor. The man for the hour was not difficult to find. Joshua, who seems to have been in every way fitted for the next great steps of Israelitish history, was the one upon whom the mantle of Moses fell. Both he and the people were exhorted to cross over the Jordan and possess the Promised Land, nothing doubting.

Moses now prepares to obey the summons to go up to Mount Nebo, the top of Mount Pisgah, and behold the land of Canaan and then be gathered to his fathers. Quietly and unostentatiously he withdrew and took his way. Who may attempt to describe his emotions as he left his people whom, as a father to them, he loved in spite of their waywardness? Or as he gazed from Pisgah's lofty height over the land of Canaan which he might view but not enter? At his feet were the tents of Israel; a few miles west was the Jordan river; beyond, the stronghold Jericho. To his right was the land of Gilead; to the left and southwest were the green fields of Beersheba, with the wilderness beyond. In front was the land of Judah,

the "hill country," and the "utmost sea." Doubtless his view included Mount Hermon far to the northward and the Lebanon mountains, also mounts Carmel, Tabor and others. It was a magnificent panorama. After an assurance that the land would be given to the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as had been promised, in silence and solitude Moses breathed his last, his soul passed within the veil and was at home with God. In the closing words of Deuteronomy, "God buried him and no man knoweth his sepulcher to this day."

"By Nebo's lofty mountain, east of the Jordan's wave,
In a vale in the land of Moab there lies a lonely grave.
And no man knows that sepulcher, and no man saw it, e'er,
For the angels of God upturned the sod
And laid the dead man there."

Such a narrative as we have gone over has doubtless already suggested significant lessons. One grows out of the providential preparation of Moses for his mission. A great principle is illustrated for God's people for all time. In like manner, he is seeking, through our varied experiences, to prepare or train us for important service for the Kingdom. The fact stands out with special distinctness in the case of Moses but the principle holds good for those less conspicuous—for you—for me, for all. The question is are we willing to fall in with God's plans and purposes, and follow where He leads. If so, we may be sure that in our circumstances and sphere, however humble or unheralded, we may render real service for our fellow men and so for Him and His Kingdom.

A great lesson is to be drawn from the experience in the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. They were undergoing necessary training for occupying and possessing the Holy

Land. They were unfitted to do so at the outset. There was their lack of faith, lack of settled purpose, lack of courage, of rising to responsibilities and of overcoming obstacles. There was no better way of developing the qualities needed than by their varied experiences, disappointments, failures, and difficulties to be overcome in the wilderness.

At length they were measurably prepared; word came to advance, and the way opened for their success. May it not be equally true in principle that one of the great objects of our own varied experiences of the vicissitudes of life, its joys, trials, sorrows, difficulties in general, is to bring out the undeveloped noble qualities of our nature, to fit us for an abundant entrance at length to the Promised Land to come, to say nothing of preparation for enlarged usefulness here; that life here is thus a training school for the higher life and service of the future both here and hereafter. There are faults, weaknesses, evil tendencies in us which we little suspect until we are tested. The trials of life bring them out and we see what needs to be done for their correction. If we receive all these experiences in the right spirit, great blessings will come to us and progress will be made in the development of graces of character, our spirits will gradually ripen, our faith develop, become restful and trustful, and so life will come to mean more to us here, and we will become thoroughly fitted for the life of the future awaiting us. If we could think of life and its experiences in this way, and remember that a loving Father is over all and directing, it would put a different aspect upon everything.

There is much to emulate in Moses himself. He was a many-sided man, great as a leader, legislator, man of faith and prayer, great in patience, great in the work of emancipating an enslaved race, leading, disciplining, and preparing them for their inheritance. Yet it is well to remember that he was but

a man after all. It was by living "as seeing Him who is invisible," realizing God's presence and the inspiration of it, that he was able to do what he did. His intercourse with God was of a most confidential character. He never pleaded with Him in vain. It was his faith, this confident sense of God's reality and nearness, which was the secret of all, and of his calm and restful spirit. It was this which gave him courage in danger, calmness and resignation in trial, patience in the face of unreasonable complaints of an ungrateful people. He endured as seeing God who is invisible—this explains it all. The same is our privilege, or may be in growing degree, and similar results to those which were wrought in his character and spirit may be wrought in ours, if we in like manner cultivate a corresponding degree of faith and we, too, more and more endure as seeing the invisible One.

Moses was a great man—never a greater in the history of Israel. Above all he was great in qualities of character, with a faith, in that early age, which may well put ours, in this age of light, to shame. We have far greater reasons for trust than he had.

JOSHUA

CHAPTER V

(Map of Canaan)

ALMOST important part of the history of the Hebrews is that which relates to the making of their nation—from the exodus to their settlement in the land of promise. The story of Moses brought the narrative up to their encampment on the east border of Canaan opposite Jericho. Here the great leader passed away and Joshua became his successor. We are now to trace the story of the latter, under whom the Hebrew people at length came into possession of the inheritance promised them long before, even as far back as the time of Abraham.

We know little or nothing about the early life of Joshua. His first appearance in the Scripture record is sudden—unheralded. Not long after their entrance into the wilderness, the Israelites were attacked by the Amalekites, a powerful tribe of the region. In this emergency Moses turned to Joshua, with whose ability he seems to have been familiar, to lead his forces against them. After an obstinately contested battle the Israelites gained a notable victory. From this time forward, while Moses lived, Joshua seems to have held the position of minister or attendant.

Joshua was the son of Nun, a member of the tribe of Ephraim. According to the chronicler he was the twelfth in descent from Joseph. He was born in Egypt in the land of Goshen. What his experience was during his early life we do not know, but the hard conditions which prevailed during the years immediately preceding the exodus must have done much

to develop the qualities of leadership which became so conspicuous in him. When, after the year spent at Sinai, the Israelitish host came to Kadesh Barnea near the southern border of the promised land and Moses appointed twelve spies to go through the land and report as preliminary to an advancement into it, Joshua was one of them. He thus had opportunity to gain information in regard to the people and the country which must have been invaluable to him later.

And now we lose sight of Joshua for thirty-eight years, or until the close of the period of their nomadic life. The records do not state who the military leader was in the campaigns on the east of the Jordan, but it is not improbable that Joshua was the one. He had already shown an aptitude for military operations, and naturally, it would seem, Moses would turn to him. The Israelites were successful and the entire region came under their sway. From this time on a different type of man from Moses would be needed, and Joshua was clearly the man for the hour. He was an ardent patriot, too, of undaunted courage, of simple faith, and entirely unselfish.

An account of the conquest of Canaan and of the division of the territory among the tribes, is found in the book which bears Joshua's name. It is regarded by many as of the same composite character as that of the Pentateuch, i. e., two or three original accounts woven together. The early part of Judges also makes reference to the conquest, throwing added light upon it and introducing some new features. It would seem from statements here made that in some cases certain tribes only, instead of the entire body, carried on the struggle in different parts, or did so at times. Also, instead of there being one or more brief campaigns, requiring but a comparatively short time, the struggle really continued for a number of years and was not always decisive. Perhaps we can do no better

than to follow the apparent course of events as given in the Book of Joshua where three principal campaigns are indicated.

The book falls into three parts. In the first (chps. 1-12) we have a narrative of the conquest as a whole in some of its more salient features. In the second (chps. 13-23) the partition of the land among the tribes with the boundaries of the several territories, is given. In the third (chps. 23-25) the closing words and the death of Joshua are set forth.

The situation when the Book of Joshua opens was about as follows: The Israelites have completed their long sojourn and discipline in the wilderness. They are encamped on the east of the Jordan a few miles above its entrance into the Dead Sea. The promised land, which a generation before they had failed through lack of faith to enter, is before them. Moses has passed away. Joshua, a man of tact and of military skill, is his successor. Will the Israelites now accomplish their great undertaking—actually possess the land to which they have so long looked forward, or will they be turned back again as at Kadesh Barnea where their faith proved inadequate? It is another crisis in their history. As a people they are far more advanced in intelligence, in faith, and in discipline than when they left Egypt.

The plan of campaign adopted at this time exhibited consummate generalship. The usual course of invaders had been to attack the country from the south, as the Israelites had originally proposed to do. But the present plan was to attack it from the east where the defences were the weakest, pierce the center of the enemies' lines, separate the north from the south, and defeat in detail the forces arrayed against them. First of all, of course, the stronghold, Jericho, must be reduced. It was but a few miles west of the Jordan river and commanded the two chief passes into the interior of the country, one to the

northwest and one to the southwest. As preliminary to this, the Jordan itself must be crossed, and for aught Joshua knew its passage might be hotly contested.

As we review the operations of the Israelites as recorded, we shall meet with the same references to God's interpositions and to great miracles wrought as in narratives preceding in connection with the exodus and the wanderings. Just how much was of a purely supernatural character and how much might today be explained by natural laws of which far more is now known than then, may not be entirely clear. We shall simply follow the account given without attempting to draw the lines or to endeavor satisfactorily to explain the unusual occurrences referred to.

First of all Joshua sends spies to examine Jericho and its neighborhood. An interesting account is given of their experiences and of how, when suspicion was aroused against them, they were concealed by Rahab under stalks of flax placed on the top of her flat-roofed house to dry, finally being let down over the wall and escaping. For her kindness it was agreed that she and her family should be protected and saved when the city was taken by the Israelites. Upon the return of these spies to Joshua, they reported that the people of the land were panic-stricken. They had not been unaware of the progress of the Israelites and of God's marvelous interpositions in their behalf from time to time since their exodus from Egypt. Thirty-eight years before, the Israelites had been panic-stricken at Kadesh Barnea. Now the tables were turned—the Canaanites are without spirit or courage while the Israelites are filled with confidence. The time was evidently ripe for the conquest.

To cross the river, now swollen from the melting snows of Hermon, was the first thing. The people devoted themselves anew to God. It was to be a religious campaign, or was so

regarded, and everything must conform to that idea. The priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant advanced into the water. The record states that immediately the waters above ceased to flow. The attempt by some to explain this by saying that a landslide some miles to the northward operated to dam the river, seems entirely unsatisfactory. How, if so, did the landslide happen to occur at precisely the right moment? The Scripture merely states the fact. The priests advanced to the middle of the river bed and stood there until the great procession had crossed to the west bank. Here a pile of stones from the channel of the river was set up as a memorial of the event. Joshua's camp was set up three or four miles to the westward on a rising bluff which overlooked the Jericho plain. This place, called Gilgal, continued to be the headquarters of the Israelites during the campaign. Here, before any aggressive steps were taken, the people renewed their covenant with God by a revival of the long neglected Passover feast and the observance of various rites of their religion. In such a campaign it was of vital consequence that the people be right with God.

Before active operations began, an event of striking significance occurred which gives an insight into the character and spirit of Joshua and enables us to understand the secret of his continued success. He was at a distance from the camp one day, perhaps reconnoitering the situation, and pondering how best to proceed to invest the stronghold in the plain before him. Suddenly he was confronted by the appearance of a warrior with sword drawn. It was a theophany or vision—a divine appearance. Joshua advances and demands whether he is friend or foe. The response was immediate, that he was captain of the host of the Lord. At once Joshua recognizes his superior officer and humbly inquires what his message may be. He is informed that Jericho is to be given into his hands and direc-

tions were no doubt given as to the course he is to pursue. This theophany was evidently designed to impress Joshua with a vivid sense of his divine mission and of his dependence upon God.

It will help to a clearer grasp of the narrative to follow out the idea of three separate campaigns as indicated in the book of Joshua. First the central which is more fully described than the others; second the southern; third the northern.

The first or central campaign included the operations against Jericho and Ai. The plan for the reduction of the former was unique. All the fighting men were to be marshalled but no weapons were to be employed. They were simply to march around the city walls seven days in succession, the ark, with the priests, occupying a central place in the order of march. After six daily circuits of the city in this way, the priests alone blowing horns, on the seventh day the city was encompassed seven times, and every ram's horn in the army was called into use. Finally, at the command of Joshua, a mighty shout was raised, and suddenly the walls of the city fell flat. Was there an earthquake? We have no account of any—the fact only is recorded. Then the Israelites rush in and the city and all its wealth fall into their hands. Thus is described the completeness of the victory. As had been agreed beforehand, Rahab and her family escaped the general slaughter. If the victors seem cruel and bloodthirsty, we must remember that this was from three to four thousand years ago, before the moral standards of the Christian era were recognized. Furthermore the Israelites regarded all this as acceptable to God—another evidence of their crude and mistaken conceptions.

The fall of Jericho opens the way into the interior of the country, and the exultant Israelites seek to follow up their

victory. A force is sent to reduce Ai (Map), a fortress of considerable strength ten or twelve miles to the northwest, up the northwest mountain pass. They advance with confidence, but suddenly their progress is checked and they are compelled to retreat. What does this mean? Does it signify that the Lord's power is withdrawn?

As he learns of it, Joshua is greatly distressed. He prostrates himself in prayer. At once word comes to him that Israel has sinned. It is finally learned that, contrary to explicit instuctions, some of the valuable booty of Jericho has been taken and appropriated to personal use by a man named Achan. Until the guilty one was punished, God's favor would not be restored. This done—Achan having been stoned to death, as a penalty and a warning—the Israelites again advanced to the attack upon Ai, and through a stratagem the place is taken and destroyed. An ambush was set behind the city. The attacking force on the front retreated as if in flight and the men of Ai pursued them, thereupon those in ambush rushed into the city from the rear, captured and destroyed it.

West of the encampment a few miles was Gibeon. The Gibeonites made peace with the Israelites through a trick. Messengers came to Joshua as if from a long distance, with mouldy bread in their baskets and shoes well worn as if from a long journey. They asked for a treaty of alliance, foreseeing the victorious outcome of the invasion. Joshua was deceived and the treaty was made. The trick was soon afterward discovered, nevertheless the Israelites kept their agreement literally.

After the central part of the country had been pacified, Joshua entered upon his campaign against the southern strongholds and their Kings. It started in this way. The action of

the Gibeonites in forming an alliance with the invaders and enemies of the land was regarded by the southern Kings as treachery to the general interests of the country. Although the several cities or strongholds were independent, each with its own chief or King, they sometimes, it seems, acted in unison. So at this time five of the leading Kings joined, the King of Jebus (afterward Jerusalem) being the leader. Their immediate object was the punishment of Gibeon, but at once the Gibeonites sent word to Joshua and sought his assistance. He promptly responded. By a forced march all night he arrived suddenly and unexpectedly upon the scene and the enemy was completely surprised and routed. As a military leader Joshua was famous for his rapid movements and his surprises of the enemy. After this first rout he pursued the retreating foe as far as the mountain passes of upper and lower Bethhoron. So long was the conflict and so decisive the victory of the Israelites, that it was said in the war-time poetry of the period which the writer of the book of Joshua incorporates in his narrative, that the sun and moon stood still to watch it. A terrible hailstorm coming up added to the panic of the enemy, and made the victory all the more complete.

The difficulty, long existent, over the great miracle, so regarded, of the sun standing still, thus, naturally, disturbing the entire planetary system of the heavens, is sufficiently relieved it would seem by the fact that it has been discovered that the language is poetic, a quotation from an ancient war-song, and not intended to be a literal statement of fact at all. This is the result of the more careful study of the language and the connections in more modern times.

According to one account the King of Jebus and his allies were shut up in a cave, whence they were brought out after the

battle and hanged. The statement in the book of Judges is that the thumbs and great toes of this King were cut off and that he afterwards died in his own city. Some of the minor details of the struggles of the period seem rather uncertain, at any rate not altogether clear.

The long and vigorous campaign in the south which followed, resulted in the conquest of the whole of southern Palestine. City after city fell into the hands of the Israelites. The strongholds of Makeddah, Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron, and last of all Debir—most of whose sites have been identified—were stormed and captured in succession. With the mention of Debir the story of the operations in the south is brought to a close. Some of these places seem later to have fallen into the hands of the native tribes again. Debir, for example, had to be subdued a second time in connection with Caleb's occupancy of the terriory which was assigned to him. But for the time being the entire southern district seems to have been overcome.

We come now to the campaign in the north and the decisive battle there (Josh. XI). The history of this final struggle is given with but little detail. Like the country at the south the northern part was governed by a number of independent chiefs who ruled over small tribes of various races which occupied the region from Mount Hermon to Mount Carmel. At the head of these chieftains was Jabin, King of Hazor, the most powerful of them all. In order to resist the further progress of Joshua a league was formed and the camp of the allied forces was pitched near Lake Merom (Map). They formed a great host, with many horses and chariots.

As soon as Joshua learned of their encampment he made one of his characteristically swift marches up the Jordan Val-

ley. As usual he finds the enemy unprepared. Without a moment's delay he dashes upon them and begins his terrible slaughter. The forces of the north were utterly demoralized, fled in confusion in all directions, everywhere pursued by the victorious Israelites. Their chariots were burned and the sinews of their horses were cut. The victory was decisive, and although the inhabitants of the northern region offered more or less resistance to the invaders for a long time, this campaign virtually closed the war. The land was substantially in possession of the Israelites, although there were portions of the country which Joshua and his hosts failed to conquer. The plain along the coast remained in the hands of the Philistines. Not a few strong-holds in the territories allotted to the various tribes, like Jebus, remained long unconquered. These fortresses often became centers of revolt against the authority of the chosen people and were at all times a serious menace. So, although Joshua was victorious, there were not a few districts which remained unsubdued. It was to be left to the individual tribes, after the assignment of territory to them, to complete the conquest. Had the work been more thorough it would have saved a vast deal of trouble later.

At some time during the period of the conquest—it is not entirely clear just when—the fulfillment of a religious obligation at Shechem (Map), in the center of the country and located between mounts Ebal and Gerizim, took place. It was in accordance with the directions of Moses before his death. The Israelites were to renew their covenant vows and learn the conditions of henceforth holding the land. An altar was erected, sacrifices were offered, and the law, as given by Moses, was read aloud to the gathered multitude. To the blessings and cursings of the law, they responded with a hearty and united Amen. It was a most impressive occasion. The loca-

tion itself was sacred in Hebrew history. Here Abraham had rested on his journey from Chaldea to Canaan, here Jacob had settled for a season with his families and flocks on his return from Mesopotamia, digging a well which remains there still. And here the descendants of these patriarchs renew their allegiance to Jehovah and accept his law as the rule of their lives. So long as they are faithful in their obedience everything will go well with them.

The next great work of Joshua was a division of the territory. In this he was assisted by the high priest Eleazer, successor to Aaron, and the heads of various tribes. The division had long before been provided for by Moses by anticipation, now the time had come for carrying it out. The record of this division has been well described as the "Geographical Manual of the Holy Land." The tribes of Reuben and Gad and one-half of Manasseh had already received their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan, the land being admirably adapted to pasturage for their flocks. The other tribes were assigned to sections west of the Jordan—Epraim in the central part, Judah in the south, and others north and south of these (Map). It was also arranged that the Ark of the Covenant should find a resting place in Shiloh, about the center of the country. Here it remained for many generations and here yearly meetings of the people took place.

When Joshua had settled all the tribes, he obtained for himself a modest inheritance among the hills of his native tribe, Ephraim. Here the old warrior found a calm resting place during his declining years. It was eighteen years before he again comes into notice in the narrative. It may have required many years before all the tribes were in peaceable possession of the territories which had been assigned them.

The last three chapters of the book give account of the closing days of Joshua. He is now far advanced in years. In his deep interest in the people he feels a natural solicitude for their future. So, realizing the temptations which would beset them with the heathen all about them, he felt constrained to utter words of warning and at the same time of encouragemen. The only safe way for them was a continued loyalty to God. Two addresses are recorded. The first is to the Elders of the tribes whom Joshua summoned to meet him at his own house. He reviews the experiences of the past years and God's goodness and exhorts them courageously to go forward in loyal obedience to the law of Moses which to them was the law of God.

The other address was given at Shechem. It was a large and popular gathering, the people generally having been invited. Here he gave his last charge. He recounted the great events of their history from Abraham down, the deliverance from Egyptian bondage, the defeat of the Amorites on the east of the Jordan, the passage of the river, and finally the conquest of the land, all these through the intervention of Jehovah. In view of all, their plain duty was to fear the Lord and serve him sincerely. It was a strong appeal, one which they could never forget. The people were deeply moved and with one accord professed their unshaken devotion to Jehovah. Then he dismissed the assembly and returned to his home. This was his last public act. Soon after the end came. His mission was accomplished, his work done, and he passed away. He was buried on the border of his inheritance.

A life like that of Joshua is richly suggestive. With what satisfaction we review it and contemplate such a character! Joshua was an Israelite in whom there was no guile—he seems to be one of the Old Testament characters of whom

no disparaging word was spoken. He was a man of rare faith and courage. Moses was aware of his worth and early laid important responsibilities upon him. When the question of appointing a successor came up, no one else was thought of. By nature and by training he was the one man suitable for the great undertaking before the Israelites—that of entering into and taking possession of the land long promised. His one aim seemed to be faithfully to carry out the will of God as it was made known to him or as he conceived it. Although there were stupendous difficulties in the way, he went forward in full reliance upon God and with full confidence in the outcome. Nor was this confidence misplaced. In nothing, perhaps, was he more conspicuous than in his faith in the unseen and in the abiding consciousness of a high controlling hand in his mission. It was this which inspired every enterprise and insured its success. And yet, courageous as he was, he was modest and retiring. He never put himself forward—he waited to be sought out. And when at length the work of conquest was over, he quietly retired to his own inheritance to spend the remainder of his days in peace. He must ever hold a foremost place among those who "through faith subdued kingdoms."

One practical lesson suggested by the story of the conquest is that the full blessings of the spiritual life are to be realized only as the result of struggle. The Jebusites, Amorites, Hittites and Canaanites of unholy impulses and evil desires within us are to be subdued and made to give place to impulses and desires which are divine in their origin. In this warfare God has a part as truly as He had in the subjugation of Canaan. He is as ready to help us in the struggle as He was to assist Joshua, if we will only turn to Him and seek His help as Joshua did. Yet it is never to be forgotten that however great our victories

in our efforts to overcome ourselves, it will still be true, as of old, that there "remains much land to be possessed." The sanctifying process is a life process, but to such as are faithful to the end, victory will finally come. When at length we see the Invisible Leader as He is—not before—we will be like Him.

A final thought suggested is that the life and work of Joshua are often spoken of as being a type of Him who, in the distant future, would be the spiritual leader and deliverer of His people. The Scripture itself suggests this. As Joshua, by the help of Jehovah, led his people into the promised land, preserved them from innumerable dangers, gave them victory over their enemies, and put them in possession of their inheritance, so Jesus was to save his people from their sins, overcome their spiritual enemies, and bring them into the heavenly Canaan at length. What the law could not do, the gospel of His grace would be able to effect. And as the long and weary wanderings of the wilderness were terminated by rest in the land of promise, so there remaineth for us, also, after our weary pilgrimage here is over, a rest which He has prepared for those who love Him. Let us hold fast our confidence in Him.

GIDEON
(And Other Judges)

CHAPTER VI

(Map of Canaan)

NOT very many years ago the vast region of the interior of Africa was designated upon the map as "unexplored territory." Little or nothing was known of it, but travelers and explorers, Livingston, Stanley and others, boldly penetrated these unknown wilds until now there is hardly a section that has not been brought to the knowledge of the world.

For a long period many sections of the Old Testament might also have been fittingly designated as unexplored territory so far, at least, as popular understanding of them has been concerned. But during comparatively recent years Biblical scholars, with their historical methods of study and investigation, have been able to make known their significance, so that it is not difficult for any who are interested to read and understand them for themselves. This is particularly true of the prophetic books. And yet, for the ordinary Bible reader, there is still much unexplored territory even in the narrative or historical portions of the Scriptures as well. It is to one of these imperfectly understood sections that I now desire to call your attention. I refer to the period of the Judges, a period covering perhaps a century between the conquest of Canaan by Joshua, and the time when the several tribes united under a single leader, and a central government was established. This transition was effected under Samuel, and Saul, David and Solomon became kings of the United Kingdom in succession.

First of all we need to get our bearings geographically (Map).

During the forty years after the exodus from Egypt the tribes, under the leadership of Moses, lived a nomadic life in the wilderness—the region between and north of the two arms of the Red Sea. They then made conquest of the territory to the east of Canaan, their plan being to invade the latter country from the east where it was less strongly fortified than at the south. While encamped in the plain of Moab not far from the Jordan, preparatory to the invasion, Moses passed away and Joshua was made his successor. Under him the country was essentially subdued in due time, after which its division among the tribes took place. Two and one-half of the tribes—Reuben, Gad and one-half of Manasseh—were located east of the Jordan, and the remaining nine and one-half to the west of it. The two tribes, strong and powerful, of Ephraim and Judah, secured the most important sections of the country, the former the central part with Shechem for its main city, the latter the portion west of the Dead Sea in which was the unconquered stronghold of Jebus. This stronghold was not taken until a number of generations later—in the time of David—and it afterward became the Jerusalem of Bible history. The other tribes were located to the north and south of these two central tribes.

There was no central government. True, the several tribes were in a measure bound together by the ties of a common religion, the tabernacle being centrally located at Shiloh. Here, from time to time, the people came together on festal occasions. Yet each tribe was practically independent, managing its own affairs, fighting its own battles. If there was an uprising within of unsubdued natives, as was sometimes the

case, or an invasion by some hostile force from without, the people rallied about some leader who seemed to be the providential man for the hour and the uprising or invasion was overcome. Sometimes more than one tribe was involved, but ordinarily there was no attempt at union. After peace was restored, these temporary military leaders retired to private life again, although, naturally, they were ever after influential citizens, and sometimes difficulties were referred to them as arbiters.

This will afford some idea of the general situation in Palestine after the time of the conquest. The lack of cooperation between the tribes rendered them an easy prey to their enemies.

In the book of Judges we have a collection of narratives pertaining to this period. Only crisis times are referred to, long stretches being passed over without special reference. The aim of the book is not to give a regular history of the period or the people, but rather to chronicle these crisis events, and to give accounts of the leaders who figured conspicuously in them. There are references longer or shorter to some twelve or fifteen of these leaders, although only four or five of them attained to special prominence. There is no satisfactory chronology of the period. The writers of these narratives tell us that so long as the people remained loyal to Jehovah they were secure from their enemies, but when they drifted away from their allegiance they were left to themselves. Only as they returned to their loyalty was the divine favor restored and they were enabled to throw off the oppressions of their enemies.

We will now turn our attention to a few of these crisis times during this eventful period, and to the leaders about whom the people rallied and who effected their deliverance.

One of the early Judges as recorded was Ehud, of the tribe of Benjamin (Map). The King of Moab, uniting his bands with Ammonites and Amalekites, all old enemies of Israel, was able to overpower the tribe of Benjamin and to take possession of Jericho, then rebuilt. Eighteen years of paying tribute and of oppression followed. At last a deliverer arose in the person of Ehud, a young man who was held in high esteem. He was chosen to superintend the payment of tribute at Jericho, which city the King of Moab had made his headquarters. The narrative states specifically that Ehud was left-handed. He concealed a dagger about eighteen inches in length under his mantle on his right thigh. He delivered the tribute to the King in person, then left, sending the tribute bearers to their homes. Shortly after, not having himself gone home, he returned alone announcing that he had a secret message for the King. The King, whose name was Eglon, caused all his attendants to withdraw. As he arose to receive the message—the record says that he was a very fleshy man—Ehud snatched his dagger with his left hand from under his coat and buried it to the hilt in Eglon's body. After assuring himself of the King's death, he passed rapidly out of the room, locking the doors behind him, and quietly left, exciting no suspicion. The King's servants supposing him to be sleeping and not wishing to disturb him, did not force the doors, so it was not until considerably later that the murder of the King became known. Meanwhile Ehud had escaped and was well on his homeward way, where, blowing his trumpet to summon the people to war, a multitude rallied and with these, armed as best they could, he rushed down the mountain passes to the fords of the Jordan east of Jericho to prevent the escape of the enemy to Moab. Ten thousand men, we read, fell before Ehud and the land was freed from Moabite oppression. Ehud is not counted as one

of the most prominent of the Judges, but the story gives a good idea of the situation at the time and of the character of the leaders and the people.

DEBORAH

The invasion of Eglon had been from the southeast. The next one recorded was from the opposite side of Palestine. The Philistines had already begun their incursions into the Hebrew uplands. But the chief warfare next following was of the Canaanites (Map), under Jabin, who finally overpowered the Israelites of the north. He had a strong force of chariots, nine hundred, and kept the people in subjection for twenty years. A distressing situation prevailed. By a series of strong fortresses, Jabin was able practically to cut off the tribes north and south of the Esdraelon plain from each other. All trade between them ceased. The people hid both themselves and their possessions. Open roads were deserted. Communication between different parts of the country was by following secret mountain paths. The population was cowed and paralyzed. The unarmed people, however numerous, were no match for the armed Canaanites. A reign of terror existed throughout the regions which bordered on the plain.

In this emergency it was a woman to whom deliverance was due—Deborah, a prophetess, who dwelt in the southern part of Ephraim near Bethel. Her holy soul was deeply stirred over the situation. She was a poetess and her songs, widely circulated, did much to arouse the dispirited people. She became very influential over a wide district, and through her agency the whole land seemed to be moved with desire for freedom and with determination to obtain it. Secret preparations were everywhere made for an uprising. For a military

leader of the movement Deborah appointed a man named Barak who dwelt near the sea of Galilee. She summoned him to come to her and in the name of Jehovah commanded him to march to Mount Tabor with ten thousand men, promising that God would draw to him Sisera, the general of the Canaanites, with his chariots and hosts, and deliver them into his hands. But he was a cautious man and finally declined to go unless Deborah went also. This she agreed to do, meanwhile sending messengers everywhere through the land organizing the revolt. Ten thousand men rallied to Tabor. It was the first time since the conquest that so much of a national spirit was aroused and that so many tribes acted together.

Mount Tabor, oval shaped, fifteen to eighteen hundred feet high, was isolated save that it was joined somewhat with the hill of Nazareth at the northwest. It commands a wide view over the plain and beyond from its summit. There was no better place for the rendezvousing of Israel. On the top of the mountain the space is ample for a large army, and it could not be attacked by the chariots of the enemy. The news of this gathering was conveyed to Sisera, commander of the forces of Jabin and his allies. He at once assembled his army at Taanach, a Canaanite fortress on the southwest border of the plain and sixteen miles from Tabor. It was near the river Kishon which had many tributaries, pouring their waters, save when their beds were dry, into the Mediterranean. This plain has long been the gathering place of armies—Egyptians, Assyrians, Babyonians, crusaders—even of Frenchmen under Bonaparte, and it has been the scene of many battles.

The signal of attack was given by Deborah. Forthwith the Hebrew army poured down the side of Tabor to rush upon the chariots of the enemy which were drawn up in the plain

below. As the two ill-matched armies met, a terrible storm arose with sleet and hail from the east which beat into the faces of the Canaanites. "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera," the rains descended and the floods came. The soil became soaked and it was impossible to manipulate the chariots. The dry water-courses were filled till they became raging torrents and many of the Canaanites were overwhelmed in them. The enemy was put to the sword by Barak, and his men fled in disorder and were utterly routed. The day was hopelessly lost for them. Sisera, leaving his chariot, fled on foot to the northeast and soon came to the black tents of Heber the Kenite—an Arab tribe at peace with Jabin but also friendly with Israel. Here he begged for passing shelter of Jael, the Sheik's wife who was in the doorway of her tent. Whether she deliberately intended treachery or not, it is not possible to know. She not only offered Sisera protection but took him into her own division of the tent which no one would think of entering in search of him, giving him a refreshing drink of milk. He soon fell into a deep sleep and was covered with a cloak. Then, perhaps recalling the fact that Israel was a kindred people and that the Canaanites were an old foe, and forgetting all else, even the claims of hospitality, she took up a tent pin, seized a mallet and drove the pin through his temple, pinning him to the ground and killing him instantly.

The results of Deborah's victory were wide-reaching. No other battle was ever afterward necessary to be fought with the Canaanites. We hear no more of them, the country was delivered and a great deliverance it was, influencing the whole future. It was the first great victory since the time of Joshua. In their distress the people had abandoned the idolatry into which they had fallen and called upon God.

This victory is recorded in a poem "The Song of Deborah." It is a notable poem. Some barbarisms in it are to be explained by the fact that it was an age of barbarism in which it was written.

GIDEON

The dates of the book of Judges are uncertain, but probably the rise of Gideon, the greatest of the Judges, was considerably later than the time of Deborah. Peace and prosperity had followed her victory. For a long time the country was free from oppression, but the story of past declines on the part of the people repeated itself and after a time idolatry began again to prevail. The invasions and raids which followed were regarded as God's scourges to bring the people to a better state of mind and to renewed allegiance to him. Various Arab tribes to the east and south of Palestine began their forays. The Midianites were the leading invaders. They had gradually spread northward from the peninsula where they were in Moses' time. The old enemies, the Amalekites, joined with them. One hundred and twenty thousand men, all told, with their households and herds, now streamed over the fords of the Jordan. The result was that harvests were plundered and destroyed, standing grain was trampled down and eaten. Grain which had been threshed was carried off, also the native flocks, and this all over the land from Gaza to Esdraelon. No wonder the Israelites betook themselves to hiding in hills, mountains and caves.

Although the prophets had preached the need of repentance and a return to Jehovah as the only hope of their release, it was only after seven annual invasions that the people turned to God. Then a deliverer was raised up in the person of

Gideon, from the tribe of Manasseh—a poor man. His brothers had been killed in fights with the invaders. Gideon had become renowned for his valor. He had not thought of leadership in Israel until called of God in a way which left no question as to his duty. A vision appeared to him while busy threshing grain in a concealed place. He was a modest man and self-distrustful. He wanted to be assured of the reality of the call in a way to satisfy himself before moving. The story is interesting—of how he threw down an altar of Baal near by, even where his own father worshiped. The people were against him until they saw that their idol made no resistance. This satisfied them. Then Gideon, seizing his trumpet, rallied the people. Messengers were sent to other tribes, those nearest to Esdraelon where the Midianites were encamped. Thirty-two thousand men responded. But Gideon, still distrustful, sought further evidence of God's presence and favor. In connection with the story of the fleece of wool and the dew, all doubt was removed. First, if there was dew on the fleece only, and the ground about was dry, he would know that God would save Israel as he had said. Thus it was. He wrung out a bowl full of water from the fleece. The second test was that the fleece be dry and that the dew should be upon the ground. And it was even so. So all doubt was removed and Gideon went forward with assured confidence. He gave out word that all the faint-hearted of the thirty-two thousand who had rallied, might return home. Twenty-two thousand went—still the number remaining was too large. If victory resulted they would claim all the credit for themselves instead of giving it to God. So by a test of drinking at a brook and the manner of it, whether by scooping up the water with their hands or by getting down upon their knees to drink, the question was

determined as to who should remain and who be sent home. Three hundred did the former, i. e. drank the water from their hands, and these were retained—all the rest were dismissed. With these three hundred he planned to attack the enemy by a stratagem. He provided every man with a horn, a torch, and a pitcher—the torch concealed in the latter. Then he divided the three hundred into companies of one hundred each, these companies at an appointed signal to attack the invaders, in the dead of night, from different sides. They were to break their pitchers, display their blazing torches, and rush forward with the war cry "For Jehovah and Gideon." This was his plan. The use of the same stratagem has reappeared in more recent times more than once.

Then Gideon seeks a final assurance. He ventures with his armor bearer into the enemies' camp one night. He heard a man tell a neighbor of a dream which he had had of a barley cake having tumbled into camp overthrowing a tent. This was interpreted to mean that Gideon would in like manner overthrow them. So, reassured, Gideon returned to his camp and sent off the three companies. When, at the dead of night, he gave the signal, the hills around blazed with torches and echoed with the blasts of three hundred trumpets and the fierce war cries. At once the unorganized camp was in a panic. In the confusion of flight in the darkness many thought their neighbors to be enemies and so they slaughtered each other. With wild cries of alarm they fled eastward toward the fords of the Jordan to reach their own side of the river. But Gideon would not permit them to escape. The thousands of his own men who had returned home had at once been notified. They seized the fords, cut off the fugitives, and great slaughter ensued—a disaster likened by Hebrew writers to that of the Egyptians at the Red Sea, or to the destruction of Sennacherib's army. A

part of the enemy succeeded in crossing, however. These Gideon followed, "faint, yet pursuing," scattered them and took their leaders prisoners.

Never was deliverance more complete. The land was freed from the invaders once for all, and Israel enjoyed quiet for a long period. Gideon was the hero of the hour. The people would gladly have made him permanent King, but important as union was, he saw that the time was not yet ripe for it and modestly declined. He was too great a patriot to take advantage of such an opportunity, as things were. The country was slowly getting ready for a closer union, but it would have been premature at that time. We will not dwell at length upon the remaining incidents of the book.

Jepthah was another of the leading judges. He delivered the country east of the Jordan of its oppressors in a notable way. Samson was another, whose exploits against the Philistines who, later, oppressed the people for a long period, furnish interesting reading. He was a man of great physical strength and performed numerous desultory feats against the enemy, slaying many but accomplishing little in the way of permanent results.

The portion of the book which we have reviewed gives us a pretty good insight into the life of that stormy period, although it must be remembered that these events represent crises rather than the continuous state of things. We read that there were intervals of twenty, forty—once even eighty years of peace. The beautiful and touching story of Ruth probably belongs to one of these intervals.

A few practical lessons are suggested in conclusion.

1. One of the things which the writer or compiler of the book made constantly prominent was this:—that only as the people remained loyal to God, or returned to their loyalty if

they had drifted into idolatry or other sins, as they often did, could they feel assured of his guidance and protecting care. Otherwise they were left to themselves to become an easy prey to their enemies. In the highest sense this is true today for God's people individually. Loyalty to Him is the necessary condition of an assurance of His care over us, of His supervision of our lives, of the impartation of His grace in our times of weakness, trial, need of any sort, and that all things will work together for our good. What an incentive to fidelity should the thought of all this be.

2. We see here illustrated the sad consequences of failure to make thorough work of conquering the enemies of Israel at the time of the conquest. It led to no end of troubles afterward, to frequent uprisings for a long period, all of which would have been prevented had these enemies been completely subdued at the outset. So when one begins the Christian life, or is engaged in conflict with temptation and sin, the part of wisdom is, with the help of God, to make thorough work of it, not to let up in the struggle until the enemy is thoroughly overcome. Otherwise the unconquered tribes of evil within, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Gergashites and all the rest, will continue to make trouble and to buffet one indefinitely.

3. The rudeness of the age suggests much. Some of the military leaders or judges, though manifestly loyal to God and acting under his guidance, were still guilty of much which would not be tolerated in this age of greater light. We must not judge them by our standards. Christianity with its great teaching of love had not yet come. We must judge them by the standards of their own time. Doing so, we shall find that with all their shortcomings they were men who rose above or were far in advance of the age in which they lived. Again, because all these things are in the Bible, cruelty, barbarity,

slavery, polygamy, it by no means follows that the Bible endorsed or approved them. The whole influence of the Bible has ever been in deadly opposition to them. In those times, as Paul says, God "winked at," i.e. passed over many things for the very reason that it was a rude age and that full light had not been given. Now that light has come, he continues, he will no longer do so, but commands all men everywhere to repent. The revelation of God has been progressive. In Christ and the New Testament we have the culmination. The sun of Righteousness has arisen full orbed and there is no longer an excuse for such sins. Laws were made in the olden time, not to endorse or approve great evils, but rather to restrict, to mitigate, do the best they could with them until it should be possible to do away with them altogether.

4. We may gather a helpful lesson from the providential raising up of men, the right men at the right juncture, for the emergencies as they arose. So it was all through the Old Testament and the New. So it has been ever since. There were Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Elijah, John the Baptist, Paul, and in later history Luther, Washington, Lincoln, Foch. All were providential men, raised up at great crises. A great fact or principle is illustrated. These were simply conspicuous instances or illustrations of a fact or principle which is as true now as of old, and true with reference to all of us in our measure. We are all providential men, or God seeks to make us so. He has some special work or mission for each one of us, for which we are specially fitted. As in the case of Esther, so may it be said of us, "Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the Kingdom for such a time as this?" The question is whether we will recognize the opportunity and the call and respond. If we are not faithful, do not heed the call, that particular work is not likely to be done and we are responsible.

The fact that our work may be humble, unpublished, unheralded in any way, makes no difference. God knows, and that is sufficient. It may be just as real and just as necessary in God's plan for the development of his Kingdom.

It is an inspiring thought that we may all have a share in the great undertaking of bringing a sinful world back to God and of helping on the triumph of the Kingdom of righteousness in the world. There is a place and a work in this great enterprise, if we will but recognize and respond to it, for every believer.

SAMUEL

CHAPTER VII

(Map of Canaan)

(I Sam. Chs. 1-25)

THE lack of union among the Israelites, after the conquest of the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, exposed them to constant peril from their enemies. From time to time there were uprisings of unsubdued natives within their bounds, and invasions from hostile tribes without. It was only after a long period, one hundred years or more, that the question of union of the Hebrew tribes began seriously to be agitated and a united Kingdom finally to be established. This transition was effected during the life-time of Samuel and under his supervision. He is the link that binds together the Judges and the monarchy. Only through some such means as this, at this particular time, could the country as a whole have been rescued from an increasingly hopeless subjugation by the Philistines. Even as it was, it required years of warfare before actual national independence was achieved. We are to review in a cursory way this period of transition.

The first book of Samuel gives account of this. As with the books preceding, there are clear indications that the material entering into it was compiled from older sources. In some cases there are duplicate and even contradictory accounts of the same events. This is perhaps to be explained by the fact that the writers or compilers of Hebrew history were accustomed often to incorporate bodily whole sections from these older sources. If there were two somewhat varying accounts

of the same event, instead of attempting to harmonize them they simply quoted both and let the two accounts stand. This may sufficiently explain the confusion which sometimes appears in the early Old Testament narratives. Second Samuel, which continues the account of the united Kingdom, was originally combined with the first book.

The local situation at the time the story of Samuel opens, was this: For a long time the country had been oppressed by the Philistines. The Tabernacle had been located at Shiloh (Map), at the time of the conquest. It was at this time ministered to by Eli, high priest, now very old. His two sons who assisted in the Tabernacle service were very corrupt, thus occasioning widespread scandal. Sometime before a prophet had warned Eli of severe judgment to come if this state of things continued, but he had been too weak to rise to the emergency. Samuel, as a little child, had been dedicated by his godly mother, Hannah, from Ramah, to the service of God in connection with the Tabernacle. For a number of years he had been ministering here under the care of Eli. Then a notable incident occurred. Samuel was perhaps twelve years old or upwards. He had become fully aware of the corrupt ways of Eli's sons, but had not himself been contaminated by them.

This incident is usually spoken of as the call of Samuel. One night, or rather in the early morning, he thought he heard Eli calling him and ran to him. Eli told him he was mistaken and to go and lie down again. This was repeated and with the same result. After the third time Eli was satisfied that it was the Lord seeking to communicate with young Samuel and told him what to say if he heard the voice again. Then it was that he received the startling message that the judgment of God would certainly fall upon the aged Eli because of the scandal-

ous conduct of his sons which still continued. That morning Eli summoned Samuel and bade him tell him frankly, withholding nothing, what the Lord had said to him. Samuel did so. Then Eli, perhaps admitting his own helplessness, said: "It is the Lord. Let Him do as seemeth good to Him," and matters continued as before. The judgment, it seemed, was not to fall immediately.

Meanwhile Samuel passes from youth to early manhood, the Lord evidently with him. Other communications came to him from time to time. A knowledge of divine things was gradually unfolded to him, and he was more and more recognized as a coming prophet. As the influence of Eli waned, his own continued to increase. In the midst of open corruption he stood forth as a witness against the wickedness of his age, recognized and honored through the land.

But now at length a time of crisis comes. The judgment which had been foreshadowed was about to fall upon Eli and his house. An ill-advised and abortive effort was made by the Israelites to throw off the Philistine yoke. A battle was fought at Aphek (Map). No details are given, but it resulted in a disastrous defeat for the Israelites. Then the leaders held a council and determined to send for the Ark of God at Shiloh, vainly supposing that with that symbol of God's presence in their midst, God himself would fight for them and give them the victory. So the Ark was brought, Eli's sons, Hophni and Phineas, coming with it. This gave renewed hope to the Israelites, and brought dismay to the Philistines, but the latter finally roused themselves and determined to fight all the harder. The result was that the Israelites were again defeated and even more disastrously than before. The Ark was captured and Eli's two sons were slain. When a report of this

reached Shiloh by runner, the effect upon the aged Eli was such that he fell over from the seat on which he had been sitting and broke his neck, killing him instantly. At once steps were taken to remove the Tabernacle and its sacred furniture to a place of safety before the Philistines, following up their victory, should come and destroy the place, which they soon after did. The Ark, it may here be said, was returned to the Israelites later by the Philistines, because of their belief that its presence among them was only a source of evil and disaster to them continually.

For the next twenty years Israel was prostrate at the feet of her conquerors. There being no longer any religious center, there was danger of the collapse of all religion, which had already reached a low ebb. But Samuel seemed to be the man for the emergency. He had so grown upon the people that there was a tacit recognition of his leadership. He early perceived that the first step toward national recovery was national repentance, and now he devoted all his energies to bringing this about. So he continued to go up and down the land, everywhere preaching his convictions and calling upon the people to turn from their sins, to put away all idolatry, and to return in loyalty to the worship of Jehovah.

In the midst of all his labors, he seems to have gathered about him a little nucleus of pupils and friends to whom he explained his views and gave them instructions and who became helpers in his work. This was the beginning of those schools of the prophets of which we read as developing from this time on for many years. A number of such groups, made up mostly of young men, seem to have been established, Samuel their leader. The members lived in communities by themselves, ate in common, received instruction in music, singing, and various branches. They went about in companies, and at length be-

came a real factor in the progress of the religious movement which Samuel was seeking to promote.

At length, after these years of unwearied preaching, reproving, rebuking and exhorting, matters seemed ripe for an advanced step. The people had learned their lesson. Calamity and oppression had driven them to repentance. Now Samuel summons them to meet in a general assembly to give public expression to their contrition, and to confer in regard to the general situation. There was a large response to the call—the whole nation seemed stirred. The meeting was at Mizpah, a hill some five hundred feet above the surrounding country, and about five miles to the northwest of Jerusalem. It is now known as Neby Samuel. Here various religious functions were performed, fasting, confession, with certain rites signifying repentance and renunciation of sins. One of the things which they did was formally to elect Samuel as their Judge. It was a recognition of the leadership which he had already attained by the mere force of his personality. He was certainly the most fitting one of all to be selected, even though he had not the usual qualifications of military skill and prowess. Yet he was a man of large prudence and strong faith, one who could be thoroughly trusted by the people. This was a nearer approach to national union than anything which had taken place heretofore, and naturally had its influence in paving the way for the closer union which came about later.

The Philistines, meanwhile, were not slow to perceive that something was brewing which, if not checked, might lead to a formidable rebellion, and prompt measures were adopted. The whole Philistine force was rallied and set out for Mizpah. As they drew near, the Israelites were dismayed. Yet Samuel had impressed them with a spirit of trust in divine protection.

They call upon him to pray God to deliver them. He does so. Then the Israelites, undisciplined, advanced to meet the foe. Providence interposed in their behalf. A terrific thunderstorm broke over the enemy and they were thrown into confusion. The Israelites rushed down upon them. A panic ensued and the Philistines fled in abject terror, the Israelites after them. A great slaughter followed and a great victory was achieved. To commemorate the deliverance Samuel set up a great stone and called it Ebenezer "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." It was near this same place that the disastrous defeat of Israel, with the capture of the Ark, had occurred twenty years before. Some of the immediate results of the victory were that the Philistines were so broken for a time as to make no fresh attack upon Israel. The national spirit of the Israelites was thoroughly aroused and they were able to recover many cities which had previously been seized by the Philistines.

Some years of quiet followed, leaving Samuel free to pursue his life vocation of educating the nation to higher ideals and to live more directly under the supervision of Jehovah. In addition to this, some of the functions of Judge in our more modern sense seemed to fall to him. Men came to him for settlement of difficulties, until at length he made regular visits at stated intervals to various places, such as Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah, and his own native Ramah. In a sense he may be said to have held court at these places. Yet he did not confine himself to them. He visited others with less regularity, redressing grievances, punishing wrong-doers, as well as continuing in the work of religious instruction. All this time his own work was supplemented by that of the schools of the prophets. So as the years passed, Samuel became more and more necessary to the

people. He was a statesman, a reformer, a preacher of righteousness.

As time went on and he felt himself unable to meet the increasing responsibilities of his position, he associated his sons with him in his duties as judge, particularly in the southern part of the country. This, however, proved to be unfortunate, for these sons, perhaps as a result of their very elevation, developed traits which Samuel could hardly have realized before. They walked not in the ways of their father and proved to be entirely unworthy. This led to a growing sense of unrest among the people. They saw plainly that if they were to remain faithful, as a people, to the Lord, and hold their own against their enemies—for the Philistines were recovering from their defeats and the Ammonites were threatening them on the east—such a state of things could not continue. A change was needed. There must be some strong hand to unite the people and prepare them for the coming crisis. So the leaders finally came to Samuel at Ramah and talked frankly of the situation as they saw it. They reminded him that he was growing old and that his sons, in their public responsibilities, were not walking in his ways, and urged him to set a king over them like the nations round about.

The accounts of the transition to a regular kingdom, with a king appointed over them, are somewhat confusing. While on the one hand it would seem as if Samuel recognized the need and took the initiative—another account says that the suggestion of a king greatly displeased him. It seemed like a slight to him—ingratitude for his past services, but especially disrespect to Jehovah whose will appears not to have been sought in the matter. But when Samuel referred the subject to him in prayer, the answer came that it was not in reality a rejection

of Samuel so much as of the Lord himself. Yet on the whole, it was probably wiser to accept the situation and grant the desire expressed, although he should first make plain to the people what it might involve in the way of trial and hardship to them, if this were done. This Samuel did. But it seemed to make no difference. The hearts of the people were set on having a king, and now, with rare unselfishness, he seeks to carry out their wish and to select the best man available for this high position.

We are familiar with the story of the anointing of Saul to be the first King of Israel:—of how he and a servant were out hunting his father's asses which had strayed from the home in Benjamin; of how they were led to consult the seer, as Samuel was called, when unsuccessful in the search, hoping that he might inform them where to find them; of how, as soon as Samuel saw Saul, tall, well-proportioned, fine-looking, he was satisfied that he was the one he was seeking; of how, before Saul left next day, Samuel made known to him the great responsibility which was to be his and anointed him for that purpose; of how, later, a public meeting was called and Saul was the one singled out by the lot—a method then often employed for determining God's will; and of how the people became enthusiastic over the choice.

It was not long after this that opportunity came for Saul to show his power of leadership. The Ammonites were making aggressions at the east of the Jordan on the tribes located there, treating the people with great cruelty. At this time they were besieging the great stronghold of the Israelites—Jabesh Gilead. When a report of this reached Saul he sent out immediate word for a general rally to go to the relief of their brethren in distress. The people responded. A great army was collected on

short notice. It was divided into three parts, which advanced by different routes toward the scene of the trouble. For the first time, the whole nation under its own King, took the field. Coming suddenly upon the Ammonites, they were utterly routed and fled in all directions. It was a great and notable victory, and it not only relieved the distressing situation, but Saul was now recognized in a more decided way than before as the rightful King, and a great ratification meeting was held at Gilgal. It was a unanimous confirmation of the previous election. Very likely the laws of the Kingdom were rehearsed, for it was a monarchy with certain limitations. God was to be recognized as the supreme Monarch, Saul his earthly representative, who was always to be subservient to Jehovah's will as made known through his prophet.

And now that the desire of the nation was carried out, a King selected and inaugurated, Samuel is ready to resign his office as Judge, henceforth to act only in the capacity of a counselor to Saul and as the medium of heavenly communications. But first he takes the occasion, before the assembly at Gilgal adjourns, to review his own life and work, and to challenge any to point out a single transaction in all that time which had not been based upon Justice and a due regard for the rights of all and the highest welfare of the people. "You know what my life has been" he says—a great thing to be able to say—and the people all testified to his integrity. Then, recognizing the dangers which were ahead of them, he emphasized the thought that their safety and prosperity would hinge upon their continued loyalty and obedience to Jehovah.

It must have been an impressive occasion—the jubilant recognition of a King who seemed to be just the one for the emergency, and the retirement of Samuel from his long public

career with none to say aught against his integrity during all that time.

One of the great objects which Saul had at heart was that of freeing the country from the Philistine yoke. He early collected the nucleus of a standing army, retaining the larger part under his own command, and placing one thousand men under Jonathan, his son, who heartily seconded his father's plans. It was in connection with the first struggle with the Philistines that Saul began to show signs of self-will. He had become impatient of this restraint and proceeded to measures which were a direct affront to the prophet and his authority. He failed in the first real test. The prophet does not hesitate to rebuke him sharply for his course, and intimates certain judgments which would come upon him if he persisted. This was a warning at practically the very outset of Saul's kingly career. The Kingship would pass from his family and be given to another if this continued.

The first clash with the Philistines was at Michmash. It was preceded by an act of great daring on the part of Jonathan and his armor-bearer. Together they scaled a seemingly inaccessible stronghold held as an outpost by the enemy, and by personal prowess alone overcame the small guard, killing several and putting the rest to flight. The panic of these soon communicated itself to the main body of the enemy who, supposing that a strong force of the Israelites was upon them, fled in the greatest confusion. Thereupon the entire army of Saul and Jonathan set out in pursuit. Many who had been in hiding joined. A great victory was gained, and a vast number of Philistines perished.

After this Saul prepared to turn all his attention to the safety and upbuilding of his government. A strong army was gathered, and warfare was carried on with various enemies

about. Neighboring tribes which had sought to undermine and overthrow or weaken his government were attacked. No full account of his campaigns is given, but in all he seems to have been successful. Yet one in particular is referred to at some length, as involving another test of his attitude toward the limitations which had been imposed upon his authority. It was a campaign against the Amalekites, hereditary enemies of Israel at the south, who were now making frequent sanguinary raids into Israelitish territory. The direction to Saul was to destroy them utterly. Just the ethics of such a command we may not fully understand in our age or why so sweeping a direction was given. We are never to forget the early age in which all this occurred. But Saul showed his independence and self-will by ignoring the direction, and seeking to retain the valuable booty which was captured, for his own ends. When charged with insubordination he sought to evade responsibility by laying it upon others. The outcome was that Samuel, once for all, withdrew from him as one utterly unsuitable and unworthy to be trusted with so high a responsibility as King, and declared to him that another would be anointed to take his place—not immediately, but in due time the kingship would be taken from his family and be bestowed more worthily. So the old relations with the King were broken off, and so far as we know Saul and he never met again. Samuel grieved over the situation, while as for Saul, he was filled with a dreadful apprehension.

After this, account is given of the anointing by Samuel of David of Bethlehem, son of Jesse, a shepherd youth, to be ultimately Saul's successor. Just how Samuel's attention was turned to him is not stated, but he was the one selected out of a large family of sons. Many things would happen before this could be brought about, many experiences would be his—some

trying, some calculated to prepare him for his coming responsibility. He is spoken of as having an attractive personality—strong, generous-hearted, a musician upon the harp, with versatile attainments. No doubt he was given particular instructions by Samuel, but withal he was probably charged to keep his own counsels. It would have been unfortunate and unwise if the fact of his anointing had become known.

After this, various interesting occurrences take place—Saul's developing hypochondria, David's call to assist in soothing his spirit through playing upon the harp, David's conflict with Goliath, his growing prominence and the like, all of which must be reserved for the next lecture.

Meanwhile the old prophet passed away. We have no account of his later years, and there is no record of his death and burial save the simple statement that he died, that all Israel gathered together and lamented him at Ramah, his home town. He had arrived at a good old age, his work was done, the time for his reward had come. Though latterly he had lived in retirement, taking no part in public affairs, his death was felt to be a public calamity, and all Israel, forgetting its rivalries and contentions, remembering only the mighty benefits which he had conferred on the nation, and his unblemished life and character, assembled as one man to do him honor. No one since Moses had become so eminent as he.

It is difficult to realize the greatness of a historic figure after three thousand years, but he must have been more than the Luther of his day. He was a child of prayer, but he was a man of prayer on his own account. This is the secret of his guidance, and of the great results which he was able to achieve for his people at a time of most serious crisis. He was clearly the man for the hour. He had set one great end before himself, the deliverance of his people—not simply from their

enemies, but from themselves, their sins, their apostasy—this indeed was the first condition of the other. This purpose he pursued unflinchingly through the years, and so blameless was his life and so stainless his integrity, that he could successfully challenge anyone to point out any respect in which, in the discharge of his duties, he had wronged anyone. He was thoroughly unselfish, patient under trial and discouragement, but perservering in what he conceived to be right and for the best interests of his people. Their two great needs were a return to religious devotion and a greater union among themselves. It was the lack of these which had been dragging the nation down. If it was best to have a King, he would not stand in the way, would do all in his power to bring it about. Although disappointed in the first one, he still held fast his confidence in God and in the high ideals which he cherished for his people.

As we think of all that he achieved, the results of his educational and religious work, and the transition effected in national life and form of government and all that this meant to Israel, then, and in the time to follow, we cannot but pronounce Samuel one of the greatest benefactors of his race. He was a good man and well deserving of the homage and honor which his countrymen were only too glad finally to bestow upon him and his memory.

We today may well emulate his character and spirit, and hold them up to the emulation of others.

DAVID

CHAPTER VIII

(Map of the United Kingdom)

(I Sam. 16—II Kings 2: 10)

DAVID was the popular hero of Israel in his day and has been so regarded in the history of the Jewish people ever since. Under his administration as King, the United Kingdom reached its highest development. The story of his life is interesting and suggestive. There were serious blemishes in his character, but his traits were predominantly good, and his spirit was such that he is spoken of as a man "after God's own heart."

As introduced to us, David is a young man tending his father's flocks near his native Bethlehem. By this experience he was schooled to manly hardihood and endurance. Having musical tastes, he became somewhat of a musician also, often beguiling the hours by playing upon some instrument, especially the harp. At his home he would naturally be instructed in the traditions of the patriarchs, the story of the Israelites from the Exodus to his time, and as to God's guidance and care of them all along down. Thus he had a religious training and grew up with a vital trust in God.

In personal appearance David is spoken of as having been very attractive, ruddy of countenance, robust of body, strong, generous hearted, every way winsome. No doubt he was instructed by Samuel, who had anointed him to be Saul's successor in due time, in regard to responsibilities to come, but with all he would naturally be charged to keep his own counsels. It would be unfortunate and lead to no end of trouble if the fact that he

had been anointed should become known. Many things would take place before the outcome foreshadowed by Samuel would be realized—some of them very trying, yet all would have their place in developing the qualities which would be needed in his future career.

Meanwhile, Saul the King seems to have been growingly afflicted with some mental malady—fits of hypochondria, low spirits. Owing to a wilful disposition and disregard of divine directions as made known through the prophet Samuel, he was at length deserted by the latter. Very possibly he became a prey to his own fears, which he could not shake off.

No doubt, also, he realized that his administration had not been altogether a success. At all events, in order to cheer him in these seasons of depression and to soothe his troubled spirit, it was suggested that the effect of music might be helpful, and his attention was turned to David as one who was skilled in the musician's art. So David was summoned to the Court. The plan seemed to succeed—the King was lifted out of his low estate mentally, for the time being, and the impression made by David was favorable upon all.

Later, (and here the narrative is not entirely clear, or its connections) the story of David and Goliath comes in. Any discrepancy or confusion must be attributed probably to the different accounts which were incorporated from older sources by the compiler. No attempt was made to harmonize differences —the same thing occurs elsewhere.

The armies of Israel and the Philistines, it seems, were confronting each other across a valley some twenty miles or so southwest of Jerusalem. A giant from the Philistines, Goliath by name, came forth every day and challenged any one from the Israelitish ranks to come out and fight him. This continued day after day. Saul offered a large reward to anyone who should

slay him, but no one was willing to make the attempt. Later, David, happening to be in the camp upon some errand for his father to his brothers who were serving in the army, was so stirred by the haughty and contemptible challenge, that he proposed to go out against him. He could not hope to cope with him physically, but he had confidence in his ability to overcome him with his sling, in the use of which he appears to have been an expert. Although it seemed unwise, even madness to his friends, David persisted. The very first stone thus hurled at the giant proved effective. It hit him in the forehead and stunned him, whereupon David ran forward and dispatched him with his (Goliath's) own sword. Whereupon the Philistines fled, the Israelites pursued them, and a great victory was achieved. David became the hero of the hour. His praises were sung in extravagant terms, with the result that Saul became growingly jealous. This jealousy became so pronounced at length that he sought to kill David, evidently regarding him as a dangerous rival. On one occasion, he hurled a javelin at him in the court, which, however, was skillfully shunned.

From this time on, we read of various attempts, direct and indirect, upon David's life. One was to have him so exposed in battle as would likely result in his death. Finally David was forced to flee for safety—he gathered a company of several hundred men about him, and lived a kind of irregular and outlaw life in southern Judah among its hills and crags. Saul, with a large force, sought to find him, but David was able to elude him each time. On one or two occasions, he had the king in his power and could easily have put him to death, but this he steadfastly refused to do. He regarded the king as the Lord's anointed, and his own sense of loyalty would not permit him to cause him harm.

The friendship which had early developed between David and Saul's son, Jonathan, is an interesting and touching feature of the narrative, showing how the latter interceded with his father, the king, in David's behalf, but in vain, and how in various ways he endeavored to befriend him and promote his safety. It is a beautiful instance of unselfish devotion between these two young men, and is often referred to.

At one time, in David's efforts to escape the persistent attempts of Saul upon his life, he and his followers fled to the country of the Philistines, becoming a kind of vassal to a Philistine king. All this time, he patiently awaited the development of events, confident, no doubt, as to the final outcome and his own establishment upon the throne.

Finally, war broke out afresh between the Philistines and the Israelites. The two armies rallied on the Esdraelon plain near Mount Gilboa (Map). Here a battle was fought, but the tide soon turned against the Israelites, and Saul, rather than fall into the hands of the enemy, fell upon his own sword and killed himself. His son Jonathan and two other sons also perished. When David learned of this, he and his adherents rent their clothes and mourned for Saul and the fallen brothers. He composed a beautiful elegy on this occasion, bewailing the loss and extolling the virtues of the King and of Jonathan, showing thus his unselfish loyalty to the King in spite of all his efforts to harm him, and especially his friendship for Jonathan.

After this, David and his troopers returned to Hebron (Map), probably the most important city in Judah at that time. They were cordially welcomed by the assembled elders of the tribe, and with one consent, they chose David to be their King and swore allegiance to him. The other tribes, however, did not acquiesce in Judah's choice, still holding with Saul's family. His only surviving son, Ishbosheth, was made their King, and

their capital was established at Mahanaim, a stronghold on the east side of the Jordan. He proved to be a weak and inactive King, and was indeed little better than a puppet in the hands of Abner, the general of his army.

From this time on, for seven and one-half years, there were several encounters between them (Israel and Judah), with the result that David's power and prestige kept increasing, while that of Ishbosheth continued to wane. After a time, a quarrel arose between the latter and his general. This led to overtures being made to David with reference to bringing to his support the entire body of the northern tribes. Later still, Ishbosheth was assassinated by some of his own attendants, and finally every obstacle to David's being proclaimed king of the entire land, seemed to be removed. The people generally turned to him as the only suitable man for the high station. So at length he was anointed King over all Israel, after having reigned for seven and one-half years in Judah alone, and high festival was kept at Hebron in honor of the event—the reconciliation of the two sections of the country.

One of the first things which David attempted to do was to secure the ancient Canaanitish stronghold, Jebus, which had remained unconquered at the time of the conquest and ever since, for his capital. This was finally accomplished, though not without a severe struggle. After this, it was strongly fortified and thenceforth was the capital of the kingdom under the name of Jerusalem.

David now enters upon a series of wars for the defense and consolidation of the kingdom. These wars resulted in the subduing of the enemies of Israel round about and the wide extension of its bounds. First there was conflict with the Philistines, long the enemies and oppressors of the people. This yoke was speedily broken, and this may be regarded as one of the

most signal achievements of David's reign. This put an end once and for all to all the friction and trouble which had been experienced from this source for generations back. The Philistines were completely subdued.

He next directed his arms against the neighboring peoples across the Jordan, who menaced the eastern borders of his territory—Moab, Ammon, and Edom. No doubt all these petty states viewed the union of the Hebrew tribes under one energetic warrior like David, with apprehension. Their suspicions soon led to open hostilities. The first to be subdued were the Moabites and they became his vassals. Then the Ammonites were overcome, together with the Syrians farther north, who sought to assist them. Their subjugation was followed by an expedition against the Edomites to the south of the Dead Sea. The success of this campaign gave David command of the harbors of the Red Sea at the northern end of its eastern arm. Sometimes these campaigns required months before success was fully achieved, but finally victory was gained over all and the kingdom was secure from external enemies.

Within a few years the whole country, from the Euphrates to the northeast border of Egypt on the southwest, was brought under Israeliteish control, the most extended bounds the kingdom ever attained. It did not include the narrow strip along the Mediterranean held by the Phoenicians at the north and the Philistines at the south—both these people being left to themselves.

The area of David's kingdom, roughly speaking, was two hundred miles in length and seventy to one hundred in breadth, yet he began with a kingdom hardly larger than a good-sized county. From Bethel to Beersheba (Map) it was fifty-five miles. The average width of Judah was twenty-five to thirty miles—one-half of this being desert. That a dominion of such

an extent as David's kingdom finally became, could be won and retained by him, was due to the fact that the two rival powers, Egypt at the southwest, and Assyria at the northeast, were at that time in no condition to oppose him. Egypt was weak and divided, while Assyria had passed into a temporary decline.

While David's extensive conquests placed the kingdom on a basis essentially military, the matter of internal organization and the development of the material resources of the country were not neglected. The old jealousies of the tribes were tactfully smoothed over and restrained by David's conciliation policy.

The government was effectively organized, while the treasury was kept well filled by tribute from the numerous subject peoples. The kingdom not only attained its most extended bounds under David, but also reached its highest point of efficiency. He built up his capital, centralizing all his interests there. It was made the religious capital of the nation also, as well as the political, by bringing to it the Ark of the Covenant from Kirjath Jearim, where it had been kept since the time of Eli, and establishing it there. It symbolized the presence of Jehovah to hallow and bless the new city. He built a palace and other new structures, had a strong bodyguard, encouraged trade, and in many ways enhanced the importance and strength of his capital city.

But with all David's success in a military way and the material prosperity which followed the establishment of the kingdom, various elements of weakness entered into his administration, and undermining influences soon became manifest. David's simple court was enlarged and the royal harem increased. He seems not to have been equal to rising above the various enervating influences and temptations which all this

threw in his way. For instance, he was led to covet and to take the wife of one of his brave warriors, causing him to be put out of the way. Such crimes were doubtless common enough with monarchs in those days, but it constituted a dark blot upon the character and life of one from whom better things were expected. The prophet Nathan boldly rebuked him, and the real nobility of David's nature appears in that at once, upon being led to realize his sin, he sincerely repented.

During the peaceful years at the close of David's great wars, he conceived the idea of building a temple for the Ark of God, as he had already built a palace for himself. Was it right or becoming that he himself live in a cedar-lined palace, while the Ark of God had only a tent? He consulted Nathan the prophet about it. At first he approved the plan, but shortly afterward he was led to regard the project otherwise. The reason given was that it seemed unbecoming for one who had been a man of war to engage in such an enterprise. Perhaps also, the time may not have seemed ripe for it. Yet David was permitted to gather material for it, and under the reign of his successor the plan would be carried forward to completion.

But while so far the career of David had been one of notable success and progress on the whole, the latter years of his reign were marked by disturbing influences. The highest point of his career had been reached. After this, it is a story of decline and fall. His empire did not lose in extent of territory, but it became restless, and troubles began to multiply to disturb the king's declining years. Side by side with the vigorous qualities which he had conspicuously manifested heretofore, were numerous weaker ones which now began to develop. For one thing, he failed to discipline his own sons, and no end of trouble grew out of that. One of the most distressing events of his declining years was the rebellion of his son Absalom. He was a young

man of boundless ambition and vain of his fine personal appearance. He had had trouble with his father before, but now, impatient of waiting until the latter's death when he might hope to come to the throne, he began to plot to secure it as soon as might be. For one thing, he endeavored in all things to ingratiate himself into the hearts of the people and to undermine the king. There was evidently at this time, not a little dissatisfaction with David's administration. He had lost his early vigor and was neglecting public affairs. This dissatisfaction was fanned into a flame. Not a little corruption prevailed also. All the arts of the demagogue were employed by Absalom to win public favor, and he gradually succeeded in stealing away from his father the hearts of the people.

David appears to have been blind to all this scheming, but when everything seemed ripe, the plot was sprung at Hebron. Absalom was proclaimed king, and so widespread did the defection from David seem to be, that he lost all courage and fled in haste across the Jordan. There at the fortress of Mahanaim, he was enabled to rally his seasoned veterans under Joab, so that when Absalom appeared upon the scene, his forces were scattered at the very first encounter with great slaughter and Absalom himself was slain. This ended the insurrection. But another soon followed, headed by Shebna, a renegade of Saul's clan, who sought to push himself to the front as a claimant for the throne of northern Israel. Only the promptest action on David's part saved the kingdom from demolition.

The remainder of David's life seems to have been spent in quiet. We hear of no more wars, and in civil matters his chief occupation seems to have been the collection of material of all sorts for the erection of the temple by his successor.

One more great trial, however, awaited him. After the death of Absalom, another son, Adonijah, began to plot for the

succession. As David was weak and bedridden and unable to attend to public affairs, it seemed important that one younger be installed at once, and Adonijah and his friends and supporters assumed that he was the one. Accordingly, at a banquet of the conspirators, he was proclaimed King. Nathan the prophet was the first one to hear of this meeting. He had been the tutor of Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba, the latter the soldier's wife whom David had coveted and married, and whom David had promised that their son Solomon should be his successor on the throne. When Nathan and Bathsheba informed David of what was taking place, David declared that Solomon should be enthroned that very day.

He was thereupon anointed with all the recognized forms, and seated upon his father's throne. The conspirators, learning of this, dispersed, not feeling strong enough to strike a single blow, and Adonijah sought safety in hiding.

Not long after this, David, conscious that his own end was approaching, sent for Solomon to receive his dying charge. And now his long reign was over and he slept with his fathers.

So we come to the close of David's eventful career. He was the real creator of the Israelitish Nation. He took a badly disorganized people and developed them into a well-organized national body. He was a resourceful ruler and did a great deal toward welding the tribes together and in developing the internal resources of the kingdom. He was a military genius, and success attended him in all his warfare with surrounding tribes. He was able to inspire the most touching loyalty on the part of his followers. Although latterly there was a decline in his power and in the real stability of the kingdom, still, taken all in all, he was the greatest of the Hebrew kings, and in subsequent ages he became more and more idealized by the Hebrew people. The period of his reign was the glorious period of their history.

It was through his house that the Messiah was at length to come. He would be one who should sit on the throne of David forever.

David had a gift of music and song, was a poet and a man evidently of refined tastes. He had a keen eye to the beauties of nature. It used to be claimed that he wrote the Psalms. It is more probable that he began a collection of Psalms or songs already existing, for use in public worship—the collection being given his name, so that in the New Testament when the "Psalms of David" are spoken of, the reference is to the whole collection. Doubtless he himself wrote some of them, but it is difficult to determine just how many.

David was a many-sided man in his character, as well as in his natural gifts. There were notable virtues in it and serious defects, but he is to be judged by the moral standards of his own day, not by the higher standards of our time. Many things in his life would be condemned by the Christian standards now, but we are not to forget that cruelty and polygamy and deception were not at all uncommon then, and were not regarded as to be especially condemned. Yet notwithstanding his defects, he was a man who sincerely reverenced Jehovah, and the main desire of his life was to do His will. When his sin was brought home to him, he frankly acknowledged it, and afterward patiently endured the terrible punishment which it visited upon him. But it was the excellent spirit which was in him, in spite of his shortcomings and sins, which led him ever after to be spoken of as a man "after God's own heart."

And what was true of him, may be true of every one of us, if we will. What an encouragement and incentive this ought to be to us.

ELIJAH

CHAPTER IX

(Map N. Kingdom)

(I Kings 17)

MANY interesting stories gather about the name of Elijah, the prophet of Gilead. He was one of the notable characters of the Old Testament. He was bold and uncompromising in his championship of Jehovah worship at a time when it was seriously menaced in the Northern Kingdom. He appears upon the scene suddenly, a number of striking incidents of his career are given, then he strangely disappears, borne upward, we read, by a whirlwind into heaven. How far, if at all, these narratives are to be regarded as literal history, we must leave for critical Bible students to determine. They were no doubt handed down orally from generation to generation before they were gathered up and written out. The object of doing the latter was to preserve them for the permanent instruction of God's people and to stimulate their faith.

Three years before the contest on Carmel, which was perhaps the most notable incident of Elijah's career, the prophet, coming from the land of Gilead east of the Jordan, appeared suddenly at the palace of Ahab, King of Israel, and announced that for a space of three years there would be no rain in the land, or dew. Then as suddenly he disappeared, going into hiding by the brook Cherith, a stream flowing from the eastward into the Jordan. This announcement indicated a judgment upon the people which many would understand, for

their apostasy from the worship of the true God. Ahab, ambitious to extend his prestige and power, sought foreign alliances, especially by marriage. In this way Jezebel, daughter of the King of Sidon of Phoenicia, became his wife and queen. She was an ardent devotee of Baal worship, a very demoralizing religion, but which she had sought, with considerable success, to introduce into the land, possibly with a view of making it the state religion. Thereupon Elijah, recognizing with his clear vision the peril involved for the true faith, felt impelled to go forth to the defense of it. To him, Jehovah alone was the true God and was to be worshipped with an undivided heart. Accordingly when he saw Baalism spreading, and Ahab permitting if not abetting the movement, his soul was greatly stirred, and he was led to appear before Ahab as he did and to present the startling message which he announced.

It was a time of crisis in Israel. When, after Solomon's death, the Kingdom had been divided, two places of worship were established in the Northern Kingdom, one at Bethel near the southern border of it, the other at Dan far to the northward, with all the paraphernalia of worship provided. They were ostensibly intended for the worship of Jehovah, but more or less pagan elements were incorporated. Thus the pure worship was in constant peril of being swept away. Now more than ever did this danger exist.

Everything was according to the word of the prophet. No rain fell. Vegetation dried up. There was no water in streams or springs, and there was great suffering with both men and beasts. Meanwhile Elijah had sought safety from the resentment of the King and his more bitter queen. He remained beside the brook Cherith until, in the fearful drought, the brook itself dried up, having been fed during this time, as

the narrative states, by ravens, whatever precisely that means, learning a lesson of God's providential care, no doubt, of those who are engaged in his service. Then, warned by the divine voice, he made his way to Zarephath, a little town far north between Tyre and Sidon, nearer the latter, the country from which Jezebel had come. Here he remained for a couple of years or more, cared for in the home of a poor widow who, through his influence, received both temporal and spiritual blessings, and very likely became a convert to his faith. Her cruse of oil did not fail and when her son died, Elijah was the means of his restoration to life again.

This period of retirement and inactivity was by no means lost for the prophet. Sometimes character is more solidly and rapidly developed in retirement and the stillness of waiting than in the sphere of activity. Here, too, he was to learn further needed spiritual lessons in preparation for the duties which awaited him, and which could only be accomplished by a mighty faith. When at length he was directed to go forth again to meet the King, he was a man of wider spiritual vision and of a stronger faith by far than when he confronted him before.

Returning to Ahab—the situation was at length so distressing that he himself, with his attendants, went forth to search for water, hidden springs or streams that his animals might not perish. About this time the word of the Lord came to Elijah to go and show himself to Ahab. So he set forth. At length they met. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?" "I am not he that troubleth Israel but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the worship of Jehovah and turned to the worship of Baal." It was a bold answer, but Elijah knew no fear. Finally he proposed a test as between Jehovah and Baal on Mount Carmel at a certain time. The people were to

be summoned, and the god who endured the test would be the recognized God of the land. It was a proposal so manifestly fair that Ahab could not oppose it.

So the summons went forth, and at the appointed time the people could everywhere be seen on their way to Carmel, some on foot, some perchance riding on camels or donkeys, all interested in the events about to take place, although not knowing precisely what was to be their nature. Mount Carmel was itself a bold ridge fifteen miles long extending from the interior of the land northwestward (Map), ending in a promontory which projected into the sea. On its summit, perhaps fifteen hundred feet high at the southeast part, is a large amphitheater which it is thought, with almost assured certainty, was the meeting place for the proposed test.

On the morning itself of the eventful day, there stood upon the mountain terrace a vast concourse of people. The King, attended by members of his court, takes the place of honor assigned to him. Then the priests of Baal, arrayed in gorgeous vestments, four hundred and fifty in number, advance in stately procession. Shortly Elijah himself appears, fresh from communion with God in some secluded spot in the mountain. His countenance wears a solemn aspect for he has serious business on hand. Yet he shows no signs of hesitation or wavering. Although alone in the multitude, he is not alone, for God is with him. When everything is ready he steps forth and addresses the people: "How long halt ye between two opinions," he says. Or, as the revision gives it, "How long go ye limping between the two sides? If the Lord, your nation's own Jehovah, be God, follow him. But if Baal be the supreme, almighty one, then follow him." Then he proposes the test which he and Ahab had agreed upon. The prophets of Baal were to take a bullock, cut it in pieces and place it upon the altar, but with

no fire under it. Then they were to call upon Baal to consume the sacrifice. Later, Elijah was to do the same and call upon Jehovah. The one who should answer by fire was to be the recognized God. And the people answered "It is well." The point of the proposal lay in this, that fire was the element over which Baal was believed by his followers to have peculiar power. If he was a real god, it would not be difficult to manifest himself in this way.

The priests of Baal make their trial first. They were given every advantage. The whole day was before them. Having slain their bullock and placed it upon the altar, they called upon the name of their god until noon. "O Baal hear us." But there was no answering voice. As their agony increased they proceeded to dance about the altar in the fanatical way which is even yet practiced by the devotees of oriental religions. Still no fire descended. Elijah began to taunt them. "Cry aloud," he said. "Perhaps your god is musing, or is gone aside on a journey, or is asleep." They are stung by his sarcasm. They cry still louder. They mutilate themselves with knives and lances. In this way they would appease their god if perchance he was angered against them for any reason. So they continued until evening, the sacrifice still unconsumed.

It was now Elijah's turn. He is calm, tranquil, deliberate. He bids the hostile prophets stand aloof and calls the people near. With his own hands he gathers up twelve stones from the ruins of an ancient altar, builds another, digs a trench about it, places wood in order, prepares the sacrifice, puts it in position, and then to render it certain to the multitude that there is no trickery or deception, he orders water to be poured again and again over the sacrifice and the wood. Then as the sun began to descend over the western sea and the hour of the evening sacrifice drew near, he bowed himself in prayer, offer-

ing quietly and without demonstration this petition: "O Jehovah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant and have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Jehovah, hear me, that this people may know that thou, Jehovah, art God and that thou hast turned their hearts back again."

Then the answer came. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man had availed much. The fire of Jehovah fell and consumed the burnt offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trenches. The people were awestricken. They fell on their faces and together cried out, "Jehovah he is God, Jehovah he is God!"

It was a thrilling scene. Elijah was vindicated and the multitude, in their revulsion of feeling and at the command of Elijah, took all the priests down to the gorge of the Kishon river and slew them there. They were regarded as deceivers of the people, sinners against the state, rebels against the authority of the only true Sovereign. Elijah's summary method of dealing with the priests has been criticised, but in that rude age, without the light which Jesus gave to the world, and with the zeal of a prophet for the honor of Jehovah, it may be sufficiently accounted for. After his subsequent experience at Horeb, when he heard the "still small voice," he might have pursued a course less severe.

The purpose of the drought was fulfilled. Elijah knew that rain was at hand. In that belief he bids Ahab arise and eat, while he betook himself to the top of Carmel, a point higher up, for prayer. After this he sends his servant to look over the sea for signs of answer. But no sign appears.. Then he prays again but with the same result. After the seventh time the servant reports a cloud in sight like a man's hand in size. This

was regarded as an earnest of the full answer, and Elijah tells Ahab to get his chariot ready to go across the plain, fifteen miles or so, to Jezreel, where his summer palace was, while he girds himself to run on in advance—an oriental fore-runner, as a Bedouin of his native Gilead would run—to the very gates of Jezreel.

But the story of Elijah is by no means completed. We are now to see a different aspect of his character. At Carmel the King had calmly looked on while his priests were being slain, but the sterner nature of his wife and queen was not so easily daunted. "God do so to me and more" she sent word to Elijah, "if I do not make you like one of these by this time to-morrow." Then, strange to say, the bold, courageous spirit of the prophet quailed. He was by this time experiencing reaction from the fearful strain of Carmel and its excitement, followed by the long run across the plain, and in such condition, weak, depressed, he was panic stricken. His life was in danger and there was no place in all the land where he could be secure from the infuriated queen. He must flee beyond Israel's limits, and unfitted as he was, he started forth. Fleeing southward, he came, after several days, to Beersheba (Map), the southern-most point of Judah. From here he went a day's journey into the wilderness and sat down to rest and to sleep under a juniper tree. Despondency had settled over him, everything appeared in the gloomiest light, and he seemed to wish only to die. It seemed to him that his mission had signally failed, and that he alone was left of loyal worshipers.

Humanly speaking, this distressing state of mind on Elijah's part may undoubtedly be accounted for in the reaction which he had been experiencing. The queen's message had come to him with a shock when he was least able to bear it. His rapid flight must have left him physicially exhausted.

Moreover he may have been laboring under the thought that by one mighty blow, his work could be accomplished, when in reality it was only just begun. Great reforms are not brought about in a day. Then, too, he knew not to what lengths the vicious hatred of the queen might go. So, weary, worn, troubled, he lay down and slept. While he slept, we read that an angel came and touched him. Awaking he found a cake and a cruse of water ready for his refreshing. Then he slept again and was again aroused. This time he was bidden to eat as a preparation for a long journey. So he journeyed on in the wilderness for forty days, until he came to Horeb, the mount of God. In the midst of his brooding and depression, a silent preparation was going on within him for the revelation which God was to make to him later, and by which he was perhaps to learn the most important lesson of his life. The place to which he had now come was one of many sacred associations. Here the law had been given to the Israelites of the Exodus centuries before. He lodged in a cave at the foot of the mountain. That night a vision was granted him. "What doest thou here, Elijah?" said a voice. In reply he pleaded that he believed himself to be the sole survivor of the servants of Jehovah in Israel, "and now" he says, "they seek my life to take it away." He had been very zealous for the worship of Jehovah and it had all seemed to him to have come to nought.

Then he was directed to leave the cavern where he was, and stand before God on the mount. He was to be taught by an impressive object lesson. Having taken his position as directed, God revealed himself in all the terror of his most appalling and startling manifestations. He would teach Elijah a lesson which he could never forget. First, there was a hurricane. A strong wind rent the mountains, and rocks began to be loosened and to fall. But God was not in the wind.

Then followed the crash of an earthquake, but God was not in that. Next there were the peals of a fearful thunder storm with startling lightning flashes accompanying. But God was not in the storm.

At last, in the solemn silence peculiar to that region, there came "a still small voice." Just what it was or how it came is not told us. It was undoubtedly some manifestation of the spirit of God in his heart. God was in that and the prophet recognized it. It was as if God would say to him, heretofore you have recognized the more terrible aspects of the divine character and working—the tempest, the earthquake, the lightning flashes of his wrath. Henceforth recognize the gentler aspects of that nature and the dominance of love. It is not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts, that my work is mainly to be carried on. There are times when the sterner phases of God's methods may be necessary, but ordinarily these others—like the still small voice of his love—are more effective. For God is gentle and tender as well as stern and just. Your method has been of the tempest and the storm; you would accomplish needed reforms by force. Henceforth employ the other method.

Elijah meekly received the great lesson he so much needed to learn. And God, after dealing thus gently with his tired and discouraged servant, now proposed to give him some new work to do. In service he could find the remedy which his soul needed, and important work for the Kingdom remained to be done. Then he was encouraged by the assurance that things were not as bad as they seemed. Instead of being himself the only loyal one, there were seven thousand others scattered through the realm who had not bowed to Baal. They ought no doubt to have declared themselves, but whether they did their full duty or not they were at least loyal to Jehovah. After

this, refreshed, strengthened, encouraged and broadened in his view, Elijah proceeded on his way—to carry out his new commission, and to find spiritual health and healing in further service for his God. He was to anoint Hazael to be King of Damascus, Jehu to be King of Israel, and Elisha to be his companion and successor.

With the incident at Carmel, and the sequel of it at Horeb, the career of Elijah may be said to have reached its climax. He had fought a great battle and gained a great victory, which had a large effect on the future religion of the nation. The revelation which he had received at the Mount of God did much to bring peace to his troubled spirit, and impressed upon him a great and needed lesson. Other things remained to be done, useful years of service were yet before him, but it was in more quiet ways and in a gentler spirit that he was to labor. He seeks out Elisha, who was to go into training with him, to be his successor. He finds him plowing in a field. At once after receiving his call he makes arrangements to go with Elijah. Later on, he, Elijah, comes in contact with Ahab again. He meets him in the vineyard of Naboth, which adjoined his own possessions, which he had coveted and secured. When Naboth had refused to sell, Ahab was greatly disturbed. At length, through the connivance of his wicked queen, Jezebel, Naboth had been murdered to get him out of the way. Now Ahab takes possession of the vineyard. Here Elijah charges him with his guilt—seems to know all about it—and declares that both he and his queen would meet with a violent and disgraceful death as a judgment, with the destruction of his house. Later, Ahab having given evidence of repentance, this judgment was modified so that the evils were not to befall his house during his own lifetime. Otherwise everything came about as the prophet had said.

Finally we have a most dramatic account of how Elijah was taken to heaven by a whirlwind. He had asked Elisha what he should do for him before he was taken away. Elisha said, "I pray thee let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." Elijah said that he had asked a hard thing, nevertheless if he should see him when he was taken, it should be so unto him, otherwise not. "And it came to pass as they still went on and talked, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which parted them both asunder and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."

Thus ended the career of the greatest of the prophets up to his own time since the days of Moses. From that time on he held a singular and permanent place in the nation's memory. Even centuries afterward the faith and hope of the people looked for his reappearance, a hope which was in some sense realized in the forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist, while in the glorious scene of the transfiguration, where the Law and the Prophets were represented by the two greatest figures in the Old Testament, Elijah was one of them. The Law had been given by Moses, but in Elijah there was found its most outspoken champion.

The story of Elijah is impressive and suggestive of practical lessons for today.

1. We are impressed by the contrast between the bold, courageous, stern message of Elijah to Ahab in the first place, and his severity of dealing with the Baal leaders after the contest, on the one hand, and the emphasis laid upon the reverse qualities, gentleness, persuasion, love—on the other, at the Mount of God. It is very likely that heroic measures were needed when Elijah employed them, and that he was the man for the hour in the circumstances. All that may be possible. His reliance was upon force to bring about the desired reforms,

and he was disappointed when he found that this did not accomplish the end sought. He needed to learn that if the heart and life are to be permanently changed, something else is requisite; that the element of persuasiveness must have a place and a part. This is well illustrated in the incident of a zealous Christian man who, in view of widespread unbelief, skepticism, and infidelity in the community, was led to exclaim: "O for some great man, some Joseph Cook, some one to come here and crush this thing out." As if opinions, convictions, beliefs long cherished, even if wrong, could be uprooted by argument simply, or by overwhelming denunciations or threats of judgment. The pastor was wiser. "Not by might nor by power, but my spirit saith the Lord of Hosts," said he, and by reliance on the gentler, more effective means as it proved, the desired end was accomplished, and a large proportion of these opposers were brought into the church. Love, after all, is the most powerful agency for promoting the Kingdom. The other method may sometimes be necessary, but one should be very certain that he is divinely called to employ it before he attempts it. The chief reliance must be upon the warm, genial, persuasive love of God in the heart.

2. Another practical lesson is suggested by Elijah's juniper tree experience. As he, suffering reaction from the fearful strain of Carmel, had become panic stricken and despondent in the face of a new peril, the threat of Jezebel, so many Christian people today have their Juniper tree experiences, seeing only the gloomiest side of the situation. They forget all God's gracious dealings in the past, deliverances, help, and conclude that their own lives and efforts have failed, and that everything is going to the bad. Their mistake is very likely in forming a judgment at a time when wholly unfitted to do so. They are tired out, exhausted, and look at

everything through a colored medium, and the outlook for the future is correspondingly gloomy and hopeless. What they probably need first of all, is rest, physical and nervous recuperation. As they become refreshed and renewed, life will seem brighter, the outlook will be more hopeful, and the old gloomy views will disappear.

It is important to recognize the causes of one's depression, and apply the corresponding remedy, not trusting his own judgment until rested and renewed. It would be helpful, also, to review the many mercies, providential blessings, interpositions, and shapings of events in the past. They will multiply upon us as we attempt to enumerate them. The blues will give way to hope, the many and the mighty unseen forces of the Kingdom will be recognized, all working for good. New service will be welcomed, and corresponding cheer will result.

3. Another lesson has to do with Elijah's growing faith. It seemed strong to begin with—no doubt it was, relatively. Without strong faith and courage, he could hardly have confronted Ahab as he did, at his very palace door. But his experience in hiding was calculated to develop it still more. He must have learned a lesson as to the providential care of God, as his wants were supplied at the brook Cherith. While dwelling with the widow at Zarephath, he had still further opportunity and occasion to learn to trust in God implicitly. By his experience there of serving, of waiting, and of meditation, he became still further girded for the struggle with the forces of the false religion, and the test on Carmel was the outcome. Even his time of reaction and weakness later, must have brought him still further lessons, more especially in the outcome of his sojourn at the mount of God and his experience there of the still small voice. His was a case of growing faith. And this is one of our great needs today. It is not enough to

be converted, to have some faith. God would have us go on and grow continually—grow by means of our various experiences, and all this to prepare us for still greater and more effective service, as in the case of Elijah.

4. We may gain a significant lesson from Elijah's address to the people at Carmel. How long go ye limping from side to side, hesitating, uncertain, wavering as between Jehovah and Baal? So, sooner or later, the question comes to each one to choose between the service and worship of God and some Baal which he may be following—not literally a pagan Baal, but whatever stands between the soul and God—worldly ambition, love of money, pleasure. These things may not necessarily be all wrong in themselves, but when made supreme, all-absorbing in any life, they become Baals, keeping one from the worship of the true God. If Jehovah be God, the supreme one, then follow him.

AMOS

CHAPTER X

(Map of Northern and Southern Kingdoms)

MANY people regard the prophetic books as constituting the driest, least interesting, hardest to be understood section of the Bible. I desire to show, or try to do so, by a single example, how by studying these books historically, that is, each in its setting, or in the light of the circumstances out of which it grew or which called it out, they may be made among the most interesting of all.

We will take up Amos, one of the so-called minor prophets —perhaps the earliest of them all (about 750 B. C.). There were prophets before his time, like Elijah and Elisha, but he is the first whose prophesies or teachings were preserved in writing.

A word should be said, first of all, as to the nature or scope of the prophetic office, concerning which many misapprehensions exist. The popular impression with many seems to be that a prophet's chief function was to foretell events; that he sustained little or no relation to the age in which he lived; that he was all the time peering into the distant ages to come, seeking as it were to map out all the future, on to the day of judgment, as some mistakenly think is done in the books of Daniel and Revelation. But this is an altogether unwarranted view of the case. As a matter of fact, the prophets were in the closest possible touch with their own times, being far more concerned with events then present than with those of the ages to come. In reality they were public teachers, a sort of independent clergy, reformers, preachers of righteousness, who felt called of God to

protest against the sins, the worldliness, the idolatrous tendencies, the hollow ceremonialism of the periods in which they lived. They expounded the law to the people, drew lessons from the past history of the nation for its guidance in the future, interpreted the providential significance of passing events, and announced the judgments of God which would befall the nation or people which did not repent. They might not improperly have been called religious statesmen.

Yet with all their denunciations of existing evils, the prophets were always hopeful of the future. They were in the best sense optimistic. The Golden Age of Israel was not in the past, but to come, and they pointed out an ideal state of things which would more and more be realized. The predictive element comprised but a small part of the prophet's instruction—it was only incidental or subordinate to his main purpose, instead of being its principal feature.

Next, in order to an intelligent grasp of the Book of Amos, we need to understand the political and religious conditions at the time. Upon the death of Solomon, third and last king of all the tribes, the kingdom was rent in twain, owing to the unwisdom of his son and successor, Rehoboam. He was unwilling to treat the northern tribes with proper consideration and they seceded. Thereafter there were two small kingdoms, side by side, often at war and never again united. In order to prevent the people of the northern kingdom from continuing to go for worship to the temple at Jerusalem, two centers of worship were established, one at Dan in the north and another at Bethel in the south (Map). Golden calves were set up to represent Jehovah, and all the paraphernalia of worship were provided. Under Omri, the hill of Samaria was purchased for a capital and it became a national stronghold. Under Ahab, Baal worship was introduced by his queen, Jezebel, and was practically made the religion

of the realm. Elijah did heroic service against it, but was not entirely successful. Under Jehu, Baal worship was destroyed, although the Jehovah worship which remained was not altogether pure. There were more or less corrupt elements in it.

Under the material prosperity of the time of Jeroboam II, during whose reign Amos appeared, the religion of the people became entirely superficial, external, a religion of form and ceremony and seemingly entirely divorced from morality. This era of national prosperity grew out of the fact primarily that the terrible wars between the northern kingdom and Syria, which had continued long and drained the resources of the land, had now ceased for many years. That power had all it could do to defend itself against the great empire of Assyria, which at that time was threatening it from the east, and which was disputing with Egypt the supremacy of the world. Israel now became richer than ever before, and the wealthy classes dwelt in great opulence and ease. The kingdom was at the zenith of its glory. But in connection with this luxury there had also come in widespread dishonesty, perverted justice, bribery, and oppression of the poor, who were sometimes sold as slaves. There was corruption everywhere. Religiously, conditions were no better. At the national festivals there were drunken revelries and shameless debaucheries, quite after the manner of the heathen. All the external forms of worship were observed with a great show of devotion. Most elaborate rites and ceremonies were maintained, but it was an empty ritualism. Although Jehovah was still recognized as supreme, his worship was much debased and had no vitality. Sin was not regarded so much violation of moral law, as neglect of religious rites. Public and private virtue had decayed—purity was at a discount, society was rotten at the core. Such was the sad condition

of things in the social and religious life of the northern kingdom at the time under consideration.

What was needed was that some Elijah or John the Baptist or Martin Luther should arise and rouse the people out of their lethargy, utter a mighty protest against prevailing corruption, the emptiness and sham and shamelessness of their religious worship, and fearlessly champion the cause of righteousness and truth. And such a man was about to appear. The time was ripe for his advent. Amos of Tekoa was the man for the hour.

As to Amos personally, Old Testament history has nothing to tell us. All we know of him is what may be gathered from the personal references in the book which bears his name—yet enough is given to furnish us a definite and interesting conception of his character and career. He was not a citizen of the northern kingdom, although he had evidently become thoroughly acquainted with its corrupt life. He came from Tekoa, a little town in Judea, six miles south of Bethlehem or twelve miles south of Jerusalem, located on a commanding hill on the edge of the Judean desert. His occupation was that of a farmer, shepherd and vinedresser.

He was a plain, unassuming man, whose surroundings were all humble. Although not educated in the technical sense, he was nevertheless well informed and was well acquainted with the current movements in the world, in his own land, and in the surrounding kingdoms. In his seclusion he had meditated deeply upon the things of God. Contrary to prevailing thought, he had come to the conviction that Jehovah, instead of being the God of Palestine only, as other lands had their respective gods, He was the one God of all the lands and controlled all the movements of the world.

As the one universal God, supreme over all, He was interested in all the nations and their welfare, and not in Israel alone.

He had chosen Israel, it is true, but it was for service—a special service, not in the sense of favoritism as they assumed, at all. If He had led Israel out of Egypt, He had led other peoples out of other lands. It was a new, broad, startling conception. The popular idea that Jehovah needed the Hebrews and their worship, in return for which He was to protect them whether or no, and whatever their character and conduct, was not warranted, was all wrong. Instead of protecting them, He was even then permitting the westward and threatening advance of the great power of Assyria, and would employ her as His instrument or agent to punish Israel for her sins, for her ignoring of her mission of service, for her great immoralities, for her mere external worship, ritual, as if that was all that was necessary, regardless of righteousness of life and an inner response to God, the most vital thing of all.

This coming of Assyria would be the great "day of Jehovah" to them, not as in the popular thought—a cataclysmic time when all Israel's enemies would be destroyed and they be at peace, but when all enemies of righteousness would suffer, even they themselves in so far as they were disobedient and disloyal to Jehovah. Amos saw clearly, as they did not, that no mere externals determined man's relation to God but the attitude or spirit within.

So much for the new and advanced thought of Amos and which formed the background of his preaching.

Although nothing had been farther from his thought, an irresistible conviction came to him that God had called him to the responsibility of the prophetic office, especially with reference to the northern kingdom, which by its persistent wickedness, was rapidly rushing on to the abyss of ruin.

So at length, under the divine impulsion, he reluctantly set out upon his distasteful errand to the proud, self-complacent

people of the neighboring kingdom. On his journey, which was short, he would pass by Bethlehem, the early home of David, with its interesting associations; then Jerusalem with its great temple—the pride of the loyal worshipers of Jehovah; then a few miles farther on he would cross the boundary line between the two kingdoms and draw near to Bethel. Conspicuous among all the structures of the latter, was a sanctuary built to rival Solomon's temple at Jerusalem. It must have been an imposing sight which burst upon the prophet's view as he approached and entered the city. One of the national religious festivals was in progress. We can imagine how his spirit must have been stirred as he saw signs everywhere that the people were wholly given to worldliness, to social and civic corruption, and to unnamable abominations. It must have required courage of a high order to stand up in the midst of all this and denounce it and to declare the sure judgment of God upon the people unless they repented. Yet this is what he did and continued to do until he felt that his mission was accomplished. He had come to strike a blow at the existing evil order of things at its very headquarters and center, and at a time when it would be likely to be most effective.

Taking his position in the Temple Court, or perhaps in some open place in the street, he began to address the people. He did not at once charge them with their shortcomings and guilt, but rather by a tactful and conciliatory introduction, their attention was arrested and their sympathy was enlisted.

He presented a graphic picture of the moral condition of the countries surrounding—Syria, Philistia, Phoenicia, Edom, Ammon, Moab (Map). One after another is arraigned for violation of the natural laws of humanity for which it would be punished—God being over all. They had all gone contrary

to the light of nature, which is common to all nations, heathen as well as others, and so were without excuse.

He appeals to the consciences of his hearers: "You know that this is so—it requires no demonstration." Then he turns to Judah, sister nation at the south, the prophet's own country, which had been favored over other nations with special revelations of God. "Even Judah is not to be spared"—judgment would fall upon her as well as the rest—not because of the same low grade of sins, barbarities, but because she had violated the higher light which had come to her through God's disclosures from time to time. She had rejected the laws of Jehovah, had not kept His statutes.

After such an introduction as this, which could hardly have failed to evoke popular applause, the prophet abruptly turns upon Israel itself. All the sins which were rife in the land were scathingly denounced. "The only difference between you and your heathen neighbors is that you have sinned against greater light, hence your sins are all the more heinous. Gross injustice on the part of your rulers is common—every spark of mercy in your hearts has been quenched by your insatiable greed. The most shameless immorality is openly practiced, lust is gratified under the guise of religion just as with the heathen; there is bribery in the courts, the poor are oppressed." A note is struck in his arraignment of Israel which resounds all through the book. "All your sins are due," he continues, "to your ingratitude to God who brought you up out of Egypt, an unorganized body of serfs, who led you safely for forty years through the perils of the wilderness, who enabled you to subdue the land of Canaan, though possessed by powerful peoples, who sent prophets to instruct you. Instead of appreciating all this—favors above all other people—you have ignored God's laws, resisted His commands, silenced His prophets. Your cup of

transgression is full to overflowing. The time is ripe for judgment. It can no longer be withheld. None of you can escape the punishment which is impending."

These are burning words to address to a proud, self-righteous people, but the prophet does not spare them. He lays bare still further their sins—of the rich, the nobles, the priests, the leaders, the women even, and shows how utterly they have come short of their responsibilities.

"God has spoken so plainly to the nation," he goes on to say, "through His providences, that anyone, if he would, might understand the message He would impart. Do not for a moment imagine that because you, of all nations, stand in a peculiarly intimate relation to Jehovah from being charged with a special mission, you are exempt from punishment—on the contrary greater privilege brings greater responsibility, and severe retribution must follow the betrayal of so high a trust. Even in the judgment of the heathen themselves, you would be condemned. In such circumstances, vain is your zealous worship, vain your elaborate ceremonialism, vain your daily sacrifices, vain your tithes and boasted free-will offerings. All these mere externals are but mockery in the eyes of Jehovah. Do not imagine you can escape His judgments."

Then Jehovah is represented as talking with them in regard to various calamities which had from time to time overtaken them in their history—famine, pestilence, national misfortunes, reverses in war. All these were intended as providential warnings against continuance in sin, designed also to lead them back to righteousness and God. "And yet ye have not returned unto me," says Jehovah. All these warnings had been in vain.

"I have given you famine and want, have withholden rain from you, have smitten your crops with blasting and mildew, and locusts have devoured your gardens and vineyards. I have

sent pestilence among you after the manner of Egypt. Your young men have been slain in battle. I have overturned cities among you, as when Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown, yet ye have not returned unto me. And now, since you have not regarded these repeated warnings, since all these judgments have failed of their purposes, nothing remains but to pronounce your doom. It will be something more deadly than anything which has gone before. Your land will be laid waste, and captivity will be your fate at the hands of the dreaded power at the East (Assyria), God's instrument or agent, whose movements westward are already beginning to excite your apprehension."

What worse fate than that, in view of the remorselessness of that power, its cruelty, its irresistibleness—the "Germany" of ancient times. It was something terrible to contemplate. "And yet this dreaded fate need not be," the prophet continues, "there is still space for repentance, which alone will avert it. Let justice be restored in the courts—let the city's corruption be purged—let your own lives be purified—then again will the favor of God rest upon you."

After this the prophet enters upon a series of visions which had been divinely opened to his mind, which present the impending judgment of God under varied pictures of disaster. But hardly had he begun to do this when the high priest of Bethel, Amaziah, sought to put an end to his terrible arraignment of the nation. Instead of sympathizing with these fearless utterances, as he ought to have done, he chafed under them, interrupted the prophet, accused him of treason to the government, reported him to the King, and then ordered him to leave the country. But Amos was not to be intimidated by threats. He defended his course. He had visited Israel at the command of God, and even went so far as to declare woe upon Amaziah him-

self and his household in connection with the coming retribution. Notwithstanding the interference, Amos finished the recital of his visions, closing with one which represented the temple shattered, its supports falling in overwhelming ruin upon the heads of the terrified worshipers who are unable to escape. And the work of destruction thus begun would be completed by the sword. He who ruled supreme over the forces of heaven and earth had issued the mandate, and its carrying out could not be averted. The book ends with a message which somewhat relieves the dark picture. The people will not perish utterly, for all are not equally guilty. A loyal remnant will remain who will in due time, after they have been sufficiently disciplined, be reëstablished in their land, and in Messianic times a new kingdom will arise, a spiritual kingdom will be inaugurated, and the true Israel of God will yet prevail.

Having completed his message and his mission, Amos returned to Tekoa, where he afterward gathered up the substance of his discourses and wrote them down in the form in which they have come down to us.

Among the prophets, Amos ranks intellectually next to Isaiah, who is usually accounted the greatest of them all, and in his book we have some of the finest writings in the Old Testament. His style is terse, dramatic, simple, yet exceedingly pointed. It abounds in metaphors drawn from scenes in nature and are of a fresh and rich variety.

His views mark a most decided advance in religious thought. God, in his conception, was supreme over all the world and not simply the local or national God of the Israelitish people. His choice of them was not for the purpose of making them His favorites or pets, as they imagined, but for a great service—to be a prophet nation to the world, and they would be held

responsible for the performance of this duty. Mere ritualistic or external worship was of no account in itself unless accompanied by righteousness of character and life. The "Great Day of Jehovah" was to be a day of judgment upon all who were guilty of unrighteousness, including themselves, and not simply upon their enemies.

These ideas were new and even revolutionary at that time, far in advance of the age, familiar as they are to us, and accepted as a matter of course. Amos was really a great man and his message was a startling one. The book is suggestive of various practical lessons.

1. We cannot but admire the moral heroism of the prophet. It was a stern message which had been intrusted to him—one calculated to arouse popular opposition, but he did not hesitate. With the conviction that it was his duty and that God would sustain him in it, he courageously took up the distasteful task and persevered in it until it was accomplished. Such a conviction is calculated to render anyone as bold as a lion, fearful of nothing. So it may be with us in our humbler spheres and lesser tasks. Once convinced that we are in the line of duty, we may confidently count upon God's support, and in like manner feel girded to a corresponding moral heroism. The same source of inspiration and power is as truly open to us as it was to Amos. God is as willing to help His faithful servants today, if they turn to Him, as He ever has been in the past.

2. The same truths which Amos declared so long ago need emphasis still. He was a prophet of righteousness and his teachings on that subject have never become superfluous or obsolete. The justice of God, the awfulness of sin, its desert of punishment, the certainty of divine retribution if it is persisted in, or when not averted by repentance—such truths as

these were his constant theme. But the people, dead in their trespasses and sins, did not heed his message. They kept right on with their oppressions of the poor, perversions of justice, greed of gain, shameful immoralities.

The outcome was, at length, as Amos had declared, really but a natural consequence of their course—the judgment of God in all its terribleness at length fell upon them. It came in the form of an Assyrian invasion, with the destruction of the nation and the captivity of its leading inhabitants. The Assyrians were employed by God as His instrument for this punishment. All this is confirmed by secular inscriptions which have been discovered in connection with excavations at the far East in the ruins of Nineveh. It may not be in the same way or form, but in some way it will still prove true that reactive consequences will be experienced by nations and peoples and individuals where there is persistent disregard of God's laws. Such courses, now, as then, are bound to bring retribution.

3. From the study of Amos we may derive a practical lesson in regard to our own religious life and worship. A religion which is not based upon morality and a worship which consists of a mere hollow ceremonialism, or a round of external observances, is worthless. In so far as religious life and worship have degenerated into such service as this, without the spirit of obedience and devotion within, ignoring justice and righteousness in the life, they are abominations to the Lord now, as truly as of old.

True religion, as Micah declares, is manifested by "doing justly, loving mercy (or kindness) and walking humbly before God." We are to offer sacrifices, not of beasts, but of a "broken and contrite heart." Religion is primarily inside, in the attitude, spirit, purpose, and when this is right, the outward life will take care of itself.

Yet there is this encouragement always, that however far one may have wandered away from his God and Father as a sinner, or however valueless his mere profession of religion and his routine observance of ritual requirements, the way is ever open to God's favor and blessing by a thorough-going repentance, turning from sin in full purpose of heart to the practice of righteousness in the daily life.

Then will God heal one's backslidings and remember his sins against him no more.

ISAIAH

CHAPTER XI

(Maps of Palestine and Old Testament World)

THE literary quality of many of the prophetic books of the Old Testament is of a very high order. There is nothing in the literature of any land of that age to compare with them. There is nothing, indeed, in the English or any other language, past or present, which, for grandeur of thought, for beauty and forcefulness of expression, surpasses them. Yet these books were written twenty-five hundred or more years ago, when such progress in the arts and sciences and culture in general, as the present age has witnessed, had not been dreamed of. It is marvelous when we think of it.

Among these prophetic writings, those of Isaiah stand out like the loftiest summit of a group of towering mountain peaks. None exhibit so wide an outlook over the affairs of the world as then known, none are so broad in scope or so statesmanlike in their grasp of events and their significance, as his. Nor are any so rich in imagery or so poetic in expression. The writer's imagination seems never to have failed him, and the figures which it supplied were of astonishing brilliancy and force. And yet in the popular knowledge of the scriptures—perhaps I should say popular lack of knowledge—all this is largely missed. The prophets as a whole are little read or understood, and, with the exception of a few notable and familiar passages, Isaiah is as little appreciated as the rest. All the more important, therefore, that we study the man who became the most conspicuous figure of his age, and his utterances as they have come down to us.

In order to understand Isaiah and appreciate his worth, we need, first of all, to consider the historical situation and the political conditions of his times, together with the prevailing religious thought and life.

Isaiah's public life covered about forty years, or from 740 to 700 B. C. The scene of his ministry was Jerusalem. It was a period of great material prosperity in both the northern and southern Kingdoms. In the former, Jeroboam II was King at the opening of this period, Samaria his capital. The terrible wars with Syria, which had long drained its resources, had ceased. That power had all it could do to defend itself against the great eastern Empire of Assyria, then threatening and oppressive and moving westward, disputing with Egypt the supremacy of the world. Jeroboam had extended the bounds of his kingdom to the north-east, recovering territory which had been taken from him. The country was richer than ever, was really at the zenith of its glory. Similar conditions prevailed in the southern kingdom. Under Uzziah it also had greatly extended its bounds, chiefly to the southeast. Its people were prosperous. Agriculture and commerce were promoted. The seaport, Elath, on the eastern arm of the Red Sea was in its possession and flourishing.

But with all this material prosperity in both kingdoms, a tidal wave of corruption seemed to have swept over the land, especially manifest in both capitals, Samaria and Jerusalem. There was dishonesty; justice was perverted; bribery was common and oppression of the poor. Morally and religiously conditions were no better. Immorality prevailed in every rank. Shameless debaucheries abounded. Public and private virtue had decayed. Society was rotten at the core. Although religious forms were still observed and scrupulously—rites, ceremonies, festivals, sacrifices, all the externals of worship—

still it was without vitality, and as in the northern kingdom at the time of Amos, sin was not so much violation of moral law as neglect of religious rites.

As to the personal life of Isaiah we know very little. He was brought up in Jerusalem and in the more influential circles. He was thoroughly familiar with the situation both at home and abroad. He had a clear perception of the nation's peril, and a vision of the outcome of events which no one else seemed to share. Fearful judgments were impending unless there were repentance and reformation. These judgments, he recognised, would be at the hands of Assyria, the great world power of the time. She would be God's instrument or tool to this end. It is important to understand this, since this is a prominent feature of the background of Isaiah's preaching. Assyria could only reach Palestine from the north, hence is always spoken of as coming from that direction. The great Arabian desert at the east of the country was impassable. The Assyrians, though enterprising and far advanced for the time, were yet fierce and war-like in their disposition, and barbarians in cruelty to prisoners taken. Hence when Isaiah spoke of judgments to come in the form of invasion by Assyria, it was something fearful to contemplate.

As to other nations concerned, and which have to do with the course of events of this period, these were Syria at the north, Damascus its capital, weak, and later succumbed to Assyria; Egypt at the southwest, quiet at this time, yet ready to urge on rebellion against Assyria after the western provinces had become vassals, promising much in the way of assistance, although seldom, if ever, making good; the northern and southern kingdoms, in the midst of a number of small provinces roundabout.

The book which bears Isaiah's name seems to be a miscellaneous collection of his writings and others, arranged without reference to chronological order. In many cases they are evidently extracts or condensations of sermons or addresses, given from time to time. Out of a mass of material, perhaps preserved in the national archives, a compilation may have been made such as was thought would be most useful. Some of the writings evidently relate to other historical situations than that of Isaiah's time. This is especially the case with reference to the large section, chapters 40-66, which clearly refers to the closing years of captivity, perhaps one hundred and fifty years later. The arrangement seems to be topical rather than chronological.

With these general facts before us, we are the better prepared to take up Isaiah's life more in detail—his call, his preaching—his work .

An account of Isaiah's call is given in chapter six. A vision came to him in the Temple. He saw a majestic and glorious figure. An unseen chorus declared his greatness and his holiness. This led Isaiah to realize his own unworthiness and his unclean life. Then one of the attending seraphim touched his lips with a live coal from off the altar and declared that his uncleanness was purged away. In response to a voice which said "Whom shall I send, who will go for us?"—he was led to respond: "Here am I, send me." Then his mission as a preacher was made known. It would be a discouraging work, for the people would not respond to his appeals, and this state of things would continue indefinitely. Yet his mission would not be in vain. God would be with him, and he should accomplish much indirectly. The future would be full of hope, for there would always be a loyal remnant, and the final outcome of all would be the triumph of righteousness and truth.

So Isaiah was inducted into his ministry. In spite of the disheartening prospect, he threw himself into the work of trying to arouse the nation to a sense of its peril, of awakening its slumbering conscience, of bringing about social and political reformation. The utter worthlessness of their elaborate ritual service, so long as their lives were selfish and corrupt, was pointed out, existing evils were denounced in terrible terms, and the sure judgments of God were declared unless there was widespread repentance. Yet forgiveness was always held out for the sincerely penitent.

A REPRESENTATIVE DISCOURSE

A good illustration of the method and spirit of Isaiah's preaching is given in the first chapter of the book. Though probably delivered considerably after the beginning of his public career, it forms a suitable introduction to the collection, and was perhaps placed first for that reason. It is one of the most representative of his discourses and sounds a key-note of them all. It sets forth clearly the points at issue between Jehovah and his people at that time. It has been fittingly termed "The Great Arraignment." We see the Prophet taking his position in a court of the Temple or other public place, the crowd collecting around him.

"Hear O Heavens, and give ear O earth," he says, "for Jehovah hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not consider (i. e. do not think). Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that deal corruptly. They have forsaken Jehovah, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are estranged and

gone backward. Why should you be stricken any more by continuing your apostasy? The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint, no part of the body politic is sound. It is all wounds and bruises and festering sores, which have neither been cleansed nor bound up, nor mollified with oil.

"What unto me is the multitude of your sacrifices, saith Jehovah. I am satiated with the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts. I have no pleasure in the blood of bullocks or lambs or he-goats. Your coming into my presence is a mere form; your perfunctory performance of religious duties is a desecration. Bring no more vain oblations. Incense is an abomination to me. As to your new moon services and Sabbaths, your appointed feasts and varied religious observances, I cannot endure them. I am weary of bearing them. My soul hateth them. Even your prayers are offensive and useless. I will not hear them.

"Wash you, cleanse yourselves, make yourselves clean. Put away your evil deeds from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Seek that which is right. Restrain the oppressor. Do justice to the fatherless, plead the cause of the widow, then Jehovah can show you favor."

Grievous though the sins of the people have been, there is still opportunity for repentance. Jehovah is willing to forgive all who will obey him. This is now the prophet's thought, and he pleads with the people accordingly.

"Come now, let us reason together, saith Jehovah. Though yours sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land, but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword. The mouth of Jehovah hath spoken and his word cannot be broken."

But the prophet foresees that this offer of pardon, kindly and tenderly made as it was, would not be generally accepted. Only a few would listen to and regard it, and judgment was accordingly pronounced. Nothing but severe discipline would restore the nation to its former and ideal character. Jerusalem's real adversaries were her own people, and not until they were purged would Zion be saved. A loyal remnant would be her salvation.

From this representative discourse, we may gain some idea of the character of Isaiah's preaching, its moral earnestness, its lofty grandeur, its spiritual power.

Other discourses are epitomized in succeeding chapters. On one occasion the prophet presents a glowing picture of the future, when the religion of Jehovah shall have pre-eminence in the world, its principles controlling all men, war done away, swords beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, peace everywhere abounding. Jerusalem will be the capital. Mount Zion, the site of the Temple, will become the most conspicuous mountain in the world, and all nations will flow to it to be taught the true views of God and of life. But alas, all this is at present far from being realized. Jehovah cannot so use the nation until it is disciplined and its sins purged away.

On another occasion he speaks of Judah as the unfruitful vine of Jehovah (ch. 5 : 1-7). He digged and enriched his vineyard, planted choicest vines, built a tower, hewed out a winepress. He looked for it to bring forth grapes and it brought forth wild grapes. Then Jehovah says, Judge betwixt me and my vineyard. What more could I have done for it? I will now take away the wall and hedge of it, and it shall be destroyed and only briers will come up. For the vineyard of Jehovah is the house of Israel. He looked for justice, but only oppression and unrighteousness had developed.

Sometimes he declares that the rulers are responsible for this state of things, the king and those with him in authority. On one occasion he attacks the dress and luxury of the women, enumerating the various objects of their adornment (ch. 3: 18-26),about as mazy a list as would be included in a corresponding enumeration in modern times. All these, he declares, shall be taken away in that day of Jehovah which was about to come, when they would be carried into captivity by the Assyrians. Yet in spite of all these exhortations and forecasts, the people kept on in their sinful ways as before.

It is not entirely clear when Isaiah presented his prophecies against the nations roundabout—Assyria, Babylonia, Philistia, Egypt,—but in them he shows remarkable familiarity with the local situation in each case. Some most interesting, even startling figures are employed.

THE SYRO-EPHRAIMITIC INVASION

We come now to the first great political crisis through which Judah passed during the lifetime of Isaiah and his relation to it—the Syro-Ephraimitic war, or invasion of Judah by Israel and Syria in coalition. It was about the year 735 B. C.. Ahaz was on the throne at Jerusalem, weak, stubborn, inadequate to the situation.

At this time Assyria, the great world-power at the east, was pushing her way westward, with ambition to bring all the western provinces under her sway. This led to a counter movement on the part of several of the little kings to combine against her. The two kingdoms to the north of Judah—Israel, with Pekah its King, and Syria, Rezin its King—although they had been warring against each other, now, in the presence of a common danger, joined their forces for common protection. They urged Judah to join them since she, also, was

likely to be attacked. But Ahaz, for some reason, was not willing to do so. Thereupon Israel and Syria determined to compel him to do so, or rather to depose him by force of arms and place some one on the throne who would cooperate with them.

To this end there had been invasion of Judah's territory, so that it suffered severely. Her armies had been defeated, and now Jerusalem, the capital, was threatened with a siege. The seaport of Elath (Map), had been seized and restored to Edom, and there was a spirit of revolt among some of Judah's dependencies.

Isaiah now appears upon the scene. With his stateman's insight he foresaw that Israel and Syria were doomed, and he perceived how weak they really were. Although the people were terrified and Ahaz was weak and inefficient, he exhorts them all to confidence and quiet. He believes that Jerusalem will be preserved inviolate in spite of all. Meanwhile Ahaz was secretly meditating an appeal to the Assyrian King, who was encamped a few hundred miles to the north, to come to his relief. This would, of course, mean submission and the payment of a heavy tribute, so Isaiah seeks an interview with Ahaz. He finds him outside the walls of the city, where, with some of his officers and others, he is inspecting the water supply in view of the approaching siege. It was probably on the west side of the city at the upper pool of Gihon that the interview took place.

Isaiah is calm and collected, with a complete grasp of the political situation and aware of the King's secret purpose. He also sees clearly that the power of the allied Kings is greatly overrated—"smoked-out firebrands" he calls them contemptuously. Ahaz is timid and helpless, and without promptitude or courage. Isaiah tells him not to be faint-

hearted or to fear, for these two powers are but the two tails of smoking firebrands. Then he declares that the plans of these two Kings, Rezin of Damascus, and Pekah of Samaria, for the ruin of Judah, will not succeed, for the head of Syria is Damascus and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. And the head of Ephraim (Israel) is Samaria and the head of Samaria is only Pekah. And the implication is that the head of Judah is Jerusalem, and the head of Jerusalem is Jehovah, in whom was security. Yet, he says, if you have no faith in him, your kingdom will not continue any more than that of Israel. The nation's safety lies not in outside help but in reliance upon its own resources, strengthened and sustained by faith in Jehovah, then all will be well. If you will not believe, you shall not be established. No confidence, no security.

Ahaz makes no reply to this address. When Isaiah asks if he would have a sign that he, Isaiah, spoke from Jehovah, the King only folded his hands and pretended that he must not tempt God.

Isaiah then addresses the whole company, pointing out that God himself would give a sign. A young woman should bear a son whose name would be Immanuel, God with us. Before this child should grow to have knowledge enough to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land, whose two kings they abhorred, shall be forsaken and Judah will be made the scene of conflict between Egypt and Assyria, the country ravaged and swept bare. And yet, through all this coming suffering, God would protect them. He then tells Ahaz directly and pointedly that the one he was relying upon might save him for the moment, but afterward would bring upon him a retribution which he had not foreseen, all of which came about later, just as Isaiah had said.

Meanwhile Isaiah waited and hoped. He urged the people not to abandon their faith in Jehovah, and not to sacrifice principle for expediency, yet after the gloomy days in store, the clouds would be lifted, and a brighter day would be ushered in.

Notwithstanding all, Ahaz went on with his plans, forming an alliance with Assyria, becoming its vassal, and agreeing to pay a heavy annual tribute. The immediate result was that the Assyrian army was set in motion, Rezin and Pekah both withdrew from Judah, and both were shut up in their respective capitals. Damascus was besieged and Syria was devastated. Israel was also ravaged, but Samaria capitulated and so Pekah saved his throne.

When the Assyrian army moved southward, Philistia was over-run, some of its strongholds taken, and the Arabian Kings in the Peninsula were overcome. Returning north at length, Damascus fell, King Rezin was put to death, and multitudes were deported far to the eastward.

Then the Assyrian King, Tiglath-Pileser, celebrated this crowning victory by bringing all the subject monarchs together at Damascus, Ahaz among them, each bringing costly gifts.

It will be of interest to note that a few years after this, all the leading actors in this great drama had passed away, including Tiglath-Pileser himself—all of these changes in less than ten years.

We now pass on a few years to a time shortly preceding the siege and fall of Samaria. Israel is still a vassal—Judah also. Owing to encouragement from Egypt, there is an altered attitude in Judah and Israel toward Assyria. Revolt is in the air. Hosea, King of Israel, actually refuses to pay tribute longer. This brings the Assyrian army before Samaria and siege is begun. Hezekiah is King of Judah, but he hesitates, although there is a strong and growing party in Jerusalem in

sympathy with the movement and in favor of an Egyptian alliance. But Isaiah, always clear upon these questions of public policy, was utterly opposed to the plan contemplated. True, he had been strongly averse to the original voluntary submission to Assyria, as we have seen, believing it would result disastrously to the country, as it did, but now that the step had been taken, he believed in carrying out the agreement in good faith. Furthermore, he had no confidence in any promises of help from Egypt. His advice, constantly reiterated, was, "Be content as you are. Above all things plan no reliance upon Egypt's promises for they will deceive you. The same causes which have led to the doom and peril of Samaria and the northern kingdom, are working in Jerusalem, and these same causes, unless removed, will lead to similar results here. Only by turning from sin and trusting in Jehovah will the threatened judgment be averted."

Isaiah's prediction as to the fate of Samaria and the northern kingdom—which the prophet, Micah, had also declared—was literally fulfilled only a little later. Shalmaneser IV of Assyria, who died before the siege of Samaria was completed, was succeeded by Sargon who carried it on until it fell, after which the leading inhabitants were carried into captivity. The terms in which Sargon himself speaks of this, in inscriptions discovered, are in complete accord with the record as given us in Kings. So it would be in Jerusalem, Isaiah declared, if the people kept on in their sinful and rebellious ways.

THE GREAT DELIVERANCE

After Sargon's death in 705 B. C. he was succeeded by his son Sennacherib. At once the important province of Babylon revolted, as it had done before. In every quarter in fact, of the

Assyrian Empire, great districts were in rebellion. It was not unusual with a change of rulers, for provinces to do this.

In Palestine, plans were at once inaugurated for united action of this sort. The first task, therefore, of Sennacherib, was to put down the uprisings at the east. This occupied him several years, and ample opportunity was thus given the western provinces to mature their plans. Egypt was secretly urging on the movement with liberal promises of aid. In spite of Isaiah's remonstrances, the Egyptian party in Jerusalem had been growing stronger. Possibly some secret understanding with Egypt had already been reached. The center of the revolt was at the north, at Sidon; in the south it was certain Philistian cities. Implicit reliance was placed upon Egypt's promises, but as yet the decisive step had not been taken.

Isaiah at this time declares that within a year Jerusalem, which he calls Ariel (ch. 29), will be brought to extremities. But suddenly the enemies would vanish and be scattered. It was a definite prediction. But the residents of Jerusalem viewed the situation differently. These evil forebodings had no meaning to them. They imagined that by their strict observances of their religious rites and ceremonies, the nation had so secured the favor of Jehovah that they could count upon his approval of any project they might undertake, and this proposed alliance with Egypt against Assyria was one of them. Isaiah declares, however, that the issue of their policy would make manifest their short-sightedness.

His conviction was, and he continued to hold it to the end, that the enemy would besiege the city and that all its plans for safety would come to naught, and the help counted on from Egypt would fail. And yet there would be deliverance, although it would come from an entirely unlooked for source.

God himself would suddenly interpose—it was not intimated how—and they would be rescued from the threatened doom. Meanwhile he continued to raise a warning voice against dependence upon Egyptian alliance, because Egypt could not be relied upon—but primarily because their dependence should be placed on God. He was opposed to the whole scheme of revolt. Now that they were vassals of Assyria—and this by their own voluntary yielding—their true policy was to stand by the agreement.

There is more or less uncertainty about the date of what is termed the Great Deliverance. The prevailing idea has been that it occurred in 701 B. C. More recent views would place it fifteen or twenty years later. But for the practical purposes of the lecture, it does not make much difference. The essential facts at the basis of the narrative are the same in either case.

At length Sennacherib moves his forces westward to reduce his rebellious vassals to submission. Tidings of his movements have reached Jerusalem. The people are no longer unconcerned. In Phoenicia, one city after another is reduced, and as reports of Assyrian success continue to come, the people become terror-stricken. Now the victorious army begins to march southward.

At this time Isaiah again steps forward, and the real grandeur of his nature appears. He has done his utmost to prevent the course which has led to all this, and has been defeated. But instead of saying, as he might have done, "I told you so," he rises above all and his words are full of encouragement. True, a time of suffering was before them—the land would be devastated; judgment would come upon the nation; but the final outcome was not doubtful; Jerusalem would remain inviolate. Though the Assyrians were an instrument in God's hands with a mission to execute, there were

bounds which even a despot could not over-step with impunity, or judgment would fall upon himself.

These thoughts Isaiah embodies in a prophecy of great beauty (chs. 10-11).

The Assyrian army, meanwhile, is advancing southward along the coast. Reaching Philistia, one after another of the rebellious cities is reduced. Judah also is overrun and many strong cities are taken. At this point, Hezekiah, King of Judah, seems to have sent a message to the Assyrian king with an offer of submission and of loyalty in the future. His offer was accepted and probably a large amount of tribute was paid. A cylinder found in the ruins of Nineveh, on which Sennacherib's account of his invasion and the result is inscribed, essentially confirms the scripture account, as far as it goes.

But now at length a new phase of the situation develops. Notwithstanding the agreement, Sennacherib is not satisfied. He now calls for the surrender of the city and takes steps to enforce his demand. He sends an officer with a section of his army. Three men are sent outside the walls to meet him on behalf of Hezekiah. The officer speaks in Hebrew and loud enough for those on the walls to hear, and tells the deputation to return and take this message: "What are you trusting in, Egypt? Do you trust in Jehovah? It was he, indeed, who sent me to destroy you, as your prophets have told you."

The members of the deputation perceive the effect of such words upon the people on the wall and housetops, and ask the officer to speak in Syrian. He refuses and speaks louder yet, for a part of his object is to intimidate the people. Then he addresses those on the walls directly, in their own tongue: "Hear the words of the great King of Assyria. Trust not in Hezekiah that he can save you, nor yet in Jehovah, but make

your peace with *me,*" says the King of Assyria. "Where are the gods of the nations who have delivered their countries?"

The defiance is received by the people in dead silence, and the deputation returns and reports all to Hezekiah. The king, in his distress, rends his clothes, covers himself with sackcloth and goes into the Temple. Then he sends to Isaiah, reporting the situation, and asks him to interpose in behalf of the people. Isaiah sends back word to the king not to fear; tells him not to be afraid of the blasphemous words of the King of Assyria and then declares that Jehovah will put a spirit in him, and he will hear a rumor, and shall return to his own land.

Meanwhile the officer has returned to Sennacherib, who by this time has removed his camp nearer Jerusalem, possibly because of the coming or reported coming of the King of Egypt. Then he sends another message to Hezekiah, repeating his previous demand, urging as before the past success of the Assyrians and the inability of any nation hitherto attacked to resist them.

Then Hezekiah spreads the defiant letter before Jehovah, pleading for deliverance. The fate of the city seemed certainly to be sealed. The repeated demand for its surrender could only mean that if not complied with, Sennacherib would come himself with his army, to bring to bear upon it those formidable engines of attack for which the Assyrians were famous and which made them so dreaded in ancient times. The despair of the people must have been beyond description. Yet, through all, Isaiah never wavered. His confidence did not forsake him whatever happened. Deliverance would come. In some unexpected way, Jehovah would bring relief. The more closely the toils seemed to be drawn about the city the more boldly he declared this, and the brighter were his visions for the future. He volunteers a message to the king who is

praying, assuring him that the King of Assyria should not come to the city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor cast up a mound against it. By the way that he came, by the same way he would return, for Jehovah would defend the city.

That night the long series of Isaiah's predictions received fulfilment. The flower of the Assyrian army was cut off. The angel of Jehovah went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000 men; and when men arose early in the morning, "behold, all these were dead bodies." So Sennacherib departed and returned to Assyria. Never was a prediction more brilliantly fulfilled. Whether the blow that fell upon the Assyrian army was due to some sudden pestilence, as some suppose, by which it was smitten, or was occasioned by some report of the unexpected approach of the Egyptian army, or from some other natural cause, or was purely supernatural, is not entirely clear, and it makes no difference. The fact remains that under different figures Isaiah repeatedly declared that although Jerusalem would pass through a terrible ordeal, deliverance in some sudden and unexpected way would come. The Assyrian host would either be scattered or annihilated. At any rate, the coincidence was too striking to be attributed to chance. Only by a direct providential interference would it seem possible to have come about. Only by direct inspiration from above could Isaiah have persisted in his confidence, and his faith was fully vindicated.

Though Sennacherib survived this expedition for twenty years and was subsequently engaged in various other military expeditions, he never renewed the attempt against Jerusalem. He was the last of the great Assyrian conquerors. The familiar verses of Byron, one of the least religious of the English poets, set forth in graphic language the scenes con-

nected with the deliverance of Jerusalem and help us to realize them:

"The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold,
And the sheen of his spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on blue Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when the summer is green,
The hosts with their banners at sunset were seen.
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host, on the morrow, lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved and forever grew still.

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride,
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider, distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail,
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpets unblown.

And the widows of Asshur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the Temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord."

The effect of this event in Jerusalem must have been tremendous in proportion to the strain which preceded it, while the fate of the Assyrian host struck the surrounding nations with terror. We hear no more of Isaiah after this deliverance, have no account of his subsequent ministry or his death.

A few words in closing in regard to Isaiah as a public man, a writer, a teacher.

He was a preacher of righteousness, this was his one constant aim. He was a practical reformer, too, laboring to correct social and political abuses, no rank or class escaping his criticism. He was a broad-minded statesman. He rose far superior to the short-sighted leaders of his time. The views which he advocated were always clear, consistent, sound. He lays down certain principles by which the nation should be guided. So far as other nations are concerned, non-interference; so far as his own, quietness and trust. While opposed to seeking assistance from Assyria in the first place, after that arrangement was made, he was strenuous to have it lived up to. No "Scrap of paper" policy for him! The soundness of his judgment was often vindicated.

As an orator he showed remarkable skill. As a poet he was preeminent among the prophets. He seemed always to have some apt figure or illustration at command. Theologically, there is much in his writings which is common to other prophets. But especially does he magnify the holiness and majesty of God. He denounces mere externals in religion, as did Amos and Hosea. One of his characteristic doctrines is that of the "remnant." There will be judgment on the nation, but a faithful remnant will be preserved. This thought appears under various figures. This would be the basis of a more glorious future. In Isaiah the Messianic prophecies reach their highest point. The Messianic King would reign in righteousness and of his kingdom there would be no end. If these predictive prophecies were not fulfilled literally and materially, they were more than fulfilled spiritually.

The book of Isaiah is certainly well worth our most careful reading and study.

JEREMIAH

CHAPTER XII

(Maps of Southern Kingdom and Old Testament World)

NEXT to Isaiah, Jeremiah, who came upon the stage two or three generations later, was the most prominent of the prophets. Like him, he was a preacher of righteousness in the capital city and active in national affairs. He was one of the central figures of that exciting period which culminated in the most momentous event in Jewish history—the fall of Jerusalem and the deportation of its leading inhabitants. Although his preaching made little impression upon a sin-hardened people and his warnings were largely unheeded, he never shrank from proclaiming his unpopular message. He was one of the bravest of men, never hesitating where duty called, yet his prevailing feeling was of grief and despair rather than of indignation and bitterness. He wept over the people because of their sins and the dreadful judgments which he clearly foresaw as impending in consequence. For evil times had fallen upon the land as so often before during its history. There was widespread apostasy from the pure worship of Jehovah—a legacy from Manasseh's long and evil reign preceding—even idolatry to some extent, and corruption and immorality in civic and social life. As a matter of fact, the nation was passing through its death agonies and nothing probably could have checked its downward course.

The book which bears Jeremiah's name is the longest of all the prophetic books. It is a combination of history, biography and prophecy thrown together without much regard for chronological order—in this respect resembling the book of his great

predecessor, Isaiah. So interwoven, in fact, are Jeremiah's discourses and the history of the times, that only as we are familiar with the latter can we understand the former. The historical situation formed the background of his preaching. If the book as a whole, does not rank as high as that of Isaiah in its literary and poetic qualities, it is still a fine production and passages of high literary merit and of rare beauty are by no means wanting in it.

The prophet himself was born somewhere about the year 650 B. C., in the little ecclesiastical town of Anathoth, about three miles north of Jerusalem. A few poor hovels mark the site of the place today. He was still a young man when he received his call to the prophetic office in the year 626 B. C. It was in the thirteenth year of King Josiah, whose reign began in 639 B. C. and ended with his tragic death at the battle of Megiddo in the year 608. The Assyrian power which had long been a terror to all the western nations, most of which it held as vassals, compelling payment of heavy tribute, was now upon the wane—a great change from Isaiah's time, when it was at the height of its glory. Egypt, just now, though rising in power, was making no inroads upon its neighbors. It was, however, watching with keenest interest the progress of events at the east, by which Assyria seemed likely, ere long, to succumb. But we must not anticipate.

Jeremiah's call was a very definite experience. It foreshadowed the nature of his work and its outcome. Intimations were given him of the great judgment which was later to fall upon the land. Meanwhile he was to speak out fearlessly whatever message might be given him, even though he might meet with opposition. He shrank from the responsibility and the cheerless outlook. Nevertheless, from this time on, for forty years, he continued to lift up his voice against the sins of the

people and their leaders whenever he had opportunity and to urge them to repent.

The earliest of Jeremiah's public utterances date apparently from the first year of his commission and are gathered up in substance in the first few chapters (2 to 6). They are discourses addressed to backsliders, for such he regards the people in their apostasy. "Once," he says, "you were loyal to Jehovah, now you never say any more, 'Where is Jehovah?' who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, led you through the wilderness, and gave you this plentiful land to eat the fruit thereof. Rather, you have defiled the land and made it an abomination. More than this, you are continually agitating the question, as back in the times of Isaiah, of an alliance either with Egypt or Assyria, as against the other—one party favoring one course, another the other, rather than to trust in Jehovah alone for protection." Then he reminds them of the fate of the northern kingdom, in consequence of its sins. So it will be with Judah unless it repents and returns to Jehovah. He will bring a nation upon you from afar, he says (referring to Assyria) which will over-run the land, destroy its products and beat down the fortified cities in which you trust. And, in imagination, he already sees the foe advancing upon them, their chariots rushing on like the whirlwind.

For plain and pungent preaching to backsliders, there is nothing to exceed the language of Jeremiah. Perhaps the searching preaching of Charles G. Finney might approach it. Of course, such preaching was not popular—it angered those who heard it, especially the leaders. In their unwarranted confidence, they would not believe that any such calamity could or would befall them. They were the chosen people. The city and temple were indestructible and they had no patience with anyone who prophesied evil.

But Jeremiah was not the only reformer of the period. The young King Josiah, having had a religious training, early felt moved to do what he could to reform existing evils. Something had been done in this direction when an event occurred which gave a powerful impetus to the reformatory movement. A great discovery was made in connection with the repairing and cleansing of the temple as ordered by him, by Hilkiah, the priest. He came upon a manuscript roll, which proved to be a copy of the book of the law, supposed to have been Deuteronomy, or a part of it, containing detailed directions as to the worship of the temple and pronouncing curses upon the people if these laws were disregarded. When the book was lost, or how, is not clear. Very likely it was during the long and evil reign of Manasseh preceding. It had been entirely forgotten. The discovery, when brought to the knowledge of the king, made a profound impression upon him. It was akin to that produced on Luther centuries later, by finding an old Bible, the first he had ever seen, in the library of the convent at Erfurt. As the king read of the blessings promised to those who faithfully obeyed the voice of Jehovah, and of the judgments which would overtake them if they did not, he thought he understood why so many calamities had befallen his people. At once he resolved what to do.

He assembled the leaders of the nation and had all this read to them. The wide space of the temple enclosure was crowded with people. After reading to them the ancient covenant, the young king declared his purpose to live in obedience to its requirements. The people were kindled to enthusiasm and pledged their hearty co-operation. The outcome was a far-reaching movement of reformation. The high places were leveled, pagan images were overthrown, the temple was purified, the long-neglected Passover feast was re-established, and a new

order of things generally was instituted. And yet, effective as this reform movement was, in many respects, it was largely superficial, or external, after all. It did not go to the root of the matter. It did not take strong hold upon the life of the people and reform their characters and conduct. They continued in their personal lives very much as before. The abuses were deep rooted and not readily eradicated. So Jeremiah continued his preaching, all the time aiming at inward reformation, that of the heart, since everywhere dishonesty, false swearing and immorality, openly abounded. His work was a necessary supplement to that of the king. Both were needed. The king certainly deserved great credit, in such an age and in the midst of such a state of things as prevailed, for the zeal which he manifested in carrying out his purposes. It was a public misfortune, indeed, when his life was prematurely cut short at the age of thirty-eight. It was in consequence of his own imprudence against which Jeremiah had warned him in vain. The circumstances were these:

It was when the Egyptian King Necho was marching through Josiah's territory along the coast, on his way to the Euphrates, to watch the situation with reference to the expected fall of Nineveh, and to be ready to seize the western provinces. Josiah determined to oppose his advance. Whether it was because he thought he could hinder him, or from a sense of loyalty to Assyria, of which he was a vassal, is not clear. Josiah's army confronted the Egyptians at Megiddo (Map), a fortress guarding entrance to the plain of Esdraelon. In the unequal contest, for the Egyptians were victorious, Josiah was mortally wounded and died as he was being borne to Jerusalem. The lamentation over his death was universal. He had devoted himself unselfishly to the welfare of his country and had made his influence felt strongly for righteousness and truth. Especially was

it a sad blow to Jeremiah who was now compelled to struggle on alone against the policy of the nation. So he continued to warn and rebuke with wonderful directness and plainness of speech.

At one time he made his way into the very forecourt of the temple. Taking his stand among the people gathered there, he startled the worshippers by proclaiming in the name of Jehovah, and amidst a storm of taunts and mockeries, that all the evils which had been spoken against them were about to be brought upon Jerusalem and every town in the land because they had hardened themselves against God's command. It was a bold thing to do and such presumption could not be tolerated, so the temple police were ordered to arrest Jeremiah and after beating him they put his feet in the stocks for the night. In the morning, however, he was released since it was realized that such an arrest was unwarranted. Thereupon he pronounced a curse upon the commandant himself who had ordered his arrest, a bolder thing than he had yet done, yet no steps were taken against him. This episode gives us a glimpse into the courage and boldness of Jeremiah as well as of the hostility which his plain speaking aroused.

Meanwhile most important events were taking place in the East. The prophecy of Nahum of the downfall of Nineveh was being fulfilled. After a long siege, the city fell, after having ruled more than six hundred years with hideous tyranny. The whole earth seems to have risen up against her at last, and for centuries thereafter the very site of the ancient capital was doubtful. Only a huge mound indicates it today. The Medes and the Babylonians divided the empire between them—the western portion falling to the Babylonians. This left the latter free now to turn their forces against Necho of Egypt, at that time encamped at Carchemish on the Euphrates River. Nebu-

chadrezzar, son of the aged Babylonian king, was in command.

Marching five hundred miles to the northwest, the battle was joined. It was a mighty struggle (605-604 B. C.) and the result was that the Egyptian forces under Necho were disastrously defeated and fled, pursued by the victorious Babylonians to the very borders of Egypt. Of course this brought all the western provinces, including Judah, under Babylonian power, as it had been under Assyrian power before. Jeremiah grasping the situation, now boldly asserts that Judah's only hope lies in her loyal submission to Babylonia. He recognized God's hand in the course of events. There was a profound purpose in it. The Babylonians were His agent in carrying out His purpose, and it was to Judah's interest in every way, if she would have her capital city preserved and her inhabitants remain secure, to recognize the situation and act accordingly. But such was not the sentiment of the people. The prophet's views were received with derision. Still he kept right on. Unless you yield to the inevitable, he said, your city will be destroyed and you yourselves will be carried into captivity by the Chaldean power. This was the doom he was now charged to hold before the people. Only a general and widespread repentance would ward it off.

At one time while in concealment, as growing out of the danger of expressing himself in public while the sentiment against him was so hostile, and in view of the fact also that at any moment he might be seized and put to death, he resolved to write out such of his addresses as seemed specially important to have preserved. Chapter 36 tells of it. His faithful friend Baruch, who was a scribe, would act as his amanuensis. A roll of skin prepared for the purpose was procured. Then the prophet dictated all the words which Jehovah had spoken to him and Baruch took them down. After the writing was completed, it was determined to seize the occasion of a public fast

which had been proclaimed when the people from all the regions round would be assembled in Jerusalem, and have his collection of prophecies read in their hearing. Baruch was directed to do this, he reluctantly consenting, and on the appointed day, from a window or balcony of a chamber over the gateway, and in the presence of a vast congregation, he read the long list of entreaties and invectives. Word was immediately sent to the council of Princes then in session in the King's palace. Baruch was summoned into their presence. As he read to them from the roll, their hearts were struck with terror. They saw their danger, and in friendliness to him, charged that he and his master conceal themselves, while they would take the roll to the king. The description given is very vivid. The king was sitting in his winter house A charcoal fire was burning in a brazier before him.

After he had listened for a few minutes, his patience was exhausted. In his anger, he seized a penknife, cut the parchment into slips and threw them into the fire until they were burned to ashes. The startling warnings seemed to produce no effect, to make no impression, either upon him or those who were about him. A few of the more reverently inclined had interceded with him not to burn the roll, but without avail. He was so mad with rage that he gave orders for the apprehension of both Baruch and Jeremiah, intending doubtless to put them to death. But Providence interposed in their favor—they could not be found and thus escaped. The prophet, however, was not dismayed. He bade Baruch take his pen and again record the messages which he gave to him, at the same time adding to them many similar words. It is this collection, very likely, which has been preserved to us, in the book which bears the prophet's name.

But in spite of everything, the king and people persisted in the fatal policy of resisting the Babylonian monarch, even entering into confederacy with neighboring kings to this end. The outcome was only what might have been expected. Nebuchadrezzar appeared before the city with his army. There must have been a siege. At any rate, in the end, the city was forced to yield. The treasures of the temple and palace were pillaged and a large number of the inhabitants were carried off into exile. This is called the first deportation. The king and court were included and many of the priests and prophets, all the princes, one thousand artificers—ten thousand in all. This was in accordance with the prediction of the prophet, and this banishment was to continue, he said, for seventy years, which may have ment was to continue, he said for seventy years, which may have been a general number for a prolonged period. Then Zedekiah, the youngest son of Josiah, and the last of the kings of Judah, was placed on the throne, under a solemn oath of allegiance to the Chaldean king.

From this time on, Jeremiah's interest was divided between his countrymen in Babylonia and those remaining in Judah. At one time he wrote to the captives (chapter 29) for their comfort and encouragement, telling them that it was God's will that they make permanent homes for themselves where they were, and to be loyal to the country of their adoption, for their prosperity was bound up with the land where they were sojourning. Their captivity was not always to continue. The time would come when Jehovah would lead them back to their native land. This was about the year 596 or 597 B. C.

But a spirit of restlessness prevailed in Judah and Jerusalem, and after the city had recovered somewhat from its fearful punishment, the proud spirited people began to sigh for independence again. The king, in defiance of his oath of loyalty,

put himself at the head of a league of the neighboring kings against the Chaldean power, invoking also the aid of Egypt in the proposed revolt. Jeremiah protested against such a course—the breaking of a covenant even with a heathen king, was a crime in his eyes, while he clearly foresaw the swift retribution which would certainly follow in the renewed invasion of the country by the Chaldeans and the reduction of the city. As usual, however, his protests were in vain. As the king's purpose became known in Babylon, Nebuchadrezzar marched in person with an army to Jerusalem and at once began a regular siege, at the same time wasting the country far and near. Once the siege was abandoned, at least suspended, owing to the approach of the Egyptian army, and during the interval the gates of the city were re-opened. One day during this period, Jeremiah set forth to go to his home at Anathoth on some personal business. As he was passing out of the city he was arrested on the assumption that he was going to the Babylonians, thus a traitor to his own land and city.

His protests of innocence were in vain He was thrust into prison as a traitor. Nor were his enemies satisfied with mere confinement—they let him down into a deep well or cistern from which the water had dried up, but with a soft mire in the bottom, into which he sank and where he would probably have perished either from hunger or suffocation had it not been for an unexpected deliverance. One of the guards of the palace, moved with pity, secured from the king a revocation of the order for his imprisonment. Then under protection of a strong guard he proceeded to his rescue. The account of this in Jeremiah thirty-eight is very graphic. He took with him some thirty men, it states, and went into the house of the king under the treasury and took thence old rags and worn-out garments and let them down by cords into the dungeon of Jeremiah. "And he said to

Jeremiah, put now these worn-out garments under thine armholes, under the cords.'' Jeremiah did so and they drew him with the cords and took him up out of the dungeon. Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard. Then, after a secret interview with the king, who weak as he was, seemed kindly disposed toward the prophet and more than once sought his counsel, he was remanded to a state prison attached to the palace. Here he remained secluded during the rest of the siege, with a certain amount of freedom and with the companionship of his friend, Baruch.

Nebuchadrezzar was successful against the Egyptian army and the siege of Jerusalem was resumed now for the last time. Details of the siege, as gathered from Kings and Chronicles, from the narrative of the prophet, and from Josephus, are of thrilling interest. The besiegers had invested the city on every side. Ingress and egress were impossible. Roundabout, gigantic mounds were reared, and these surmounted by forts overtopping the walls, which were battered day and night by huge battering rams. Archers sent a constant shower of arrows into the city. Darts, tipped with fire, kindled the roofs of the houses. Great stones were hurled by catapults. All this continued day after day and month after month. But the besieged were not behind in their resources of defence. Where the walls were broken, they were replaced by new ones. The ramparts were vigorously defended by archers and slingers of equal bravery with the Chaldeans. Yet in spite of all, nothing could prevent the final catastrophe. Not only was there the enemy outside to contend with, there was famine within. Provisions became exhausted. Sallies to replenish the stores were made with desperation, but in vain. They were repulsed every time. Then wasted skeletons began to be seen on the streets. The wealthiest citizens were glad to search for food even among the refuse heaps. To such straits

were the people reduced that sometimes their children were put to death and eaten. Then pestilence was added to the general distress. For eighteen months, excepting the period of the suspension of the siege, the terrible struggle continued. Then the end came.

At midnight preceding the fatal day, a breach was made in the walls. The inhabitants were so exhausted that they had no further power of resistance. An entrance was effected by the enemy. Through the darkness of the night they silently made their way to the center of the temple court.

The first victims were those who occupied the sacred buildings, princes, priests, various officials, and the marble courts ran with blood. The alarm soon spread. The sleeping city awoke. Before the sun had risen, the king with his family and royal guards escaped through some narrow passage at the southeast corner of the city. They had hoped to pass over to the east of the Jordan by the Jericho road, but their departure was soon discovered by the Chaldeans and they were pursued and overtaken in the plain of Jericho. The king's soldiers were scattered and he himself and family were carried off in chains to the camp of Nebuchadrezzar at Riblah, ten days' journey north. Here a solemn judgment was pronounced upon him because of his broken oath. His courtiers and sons were executed in his sight, and then, according to the barbarous usages of the East, his eyes were put out and he was taken to Babylon. Here, according to tradition, he was compelled to work like a slave in a mill.

There was a long suspense at Jerusalem. It was not until a month later that the finishing stroke of the work of destruction was given. By order of Nebuchadrezzar, the temple, palace, house of nobles, were deliberately set on fire, while men and women, age and youth alike, fell victims to the passions or the

cruelty of the conquerors. So perished the city of David. Retribution for its long continued sins had come. Another deportation of the inhabitants took place—all people of the better class—only some of the poorest left to cultivate the soil. It is not known how many thousands were taken. Then after a long and wearisome journey of many hundred miles, they were settled in the regions of Babylon. Over the remnants of the population left behind, a leader, Gedaliah by name, was placed. The whole land was desolate. Everything was as Jeremiah had predicted. The kingdom of Judah was at an end.

As to the prophet himself, he was kindly dealt with by the conquerors. He was taken out of prison, given his liberty and treated with special consideration. His attitude had been known to Nebuchadrezzar and he was permitted his choice between remaining with his people in Jerusalem or going with the rest to Babylon. He concluded to remain. For a brief time, the little company prospered and Jeremiah was the pastor of the flock, but suddenly in the midst of all, the governor and his supporters were treacherously murdered by certain renegade Jews, urged on from the outside. Then, despite the advice of the aged prophet, the survivors of the massacre, fearing the wrath of the Babylonians, decided to fly to Egypt. There it was that the closing days of the prophet were probably spent among the refugees, and this is the last that we know of him certainly. Various traditions in regard to him have come down, but they cannot probably be relied upon. One of them is to the effect that he was stoned to death by the angry people, who were impatient of his denunciations of their evil and idolatrous ways.

The narrative we have followed includes one of the most important periods in the history of the Jews. Jerusalem had long been the capital city and the center of worship. Though often besieged, this was the first time it had been utterly de-

stroyed. Many notable men had figured here. Perhaps no one was a more marked character than Jeremiah, strong, manly, confident in his message, hesitating not at opposition, but doing all in his power to save his city and the people from the destruction which he clearly foresaw as the outcome of their course. The story carries many lessons with it, so obvious that it is hardly necessary to point them out.

How significant and encouraging, for instance, the providential care of the prophet as he sought to meet his difficult responsibility, his unpopular task, with hostility constantly aroused against him and dangers all the time threatened.

What a lesson from the folly of the king in burning up the parchment roll which contained uncomfortable and aggravating truth, and how equally foolish for men today to try to do away with the everlasting truth of God by seeking to destroy the Bible, which contains it.

We learn, too, how varied the means God is able to employ in his providence to effect His purposes. Here it was the Chaldean power and his aim was judgment. At other times and for other purposes, other nations were employed. They acted freely in carrying out their own plans, but in and through all, God was operating in the interest of His cause and kingdom. And so He operates today, employing men and nations and other agencies, over-ruling constantly, even making the wrath of men to praise him, thus utilizing his enemies' doings for His own ends.

Another thing emphasized by Jeremiah and brought out with great distinctness and as at no time before, is the idea of individual responsibility. Before this, the people as a whole, or the nation, were dealt with. Now it is the individual. Men are not responsible for the sins of their ancestors. They might suffer the consequences, but are not to be punished for them.

Each one is responsible for his own conduct and will be held accountable for it.

Another thing still: Jeremiah dwells upon the spirituality of religion. It does not consist in rites and ceremonies and various external forms, although these might have their place and value. It is rather a life, or experience, or attitude, or spirit within. Other prophets had emphasized this before—Amos, Isaiah—but Jeremiah gives it fresh emphasis. Thus, as far back as these great prophets, hundreds of years before Christ, this important distinction was brought out and made clear. Religion is something inside primarily and first of all. When everything is right within, the external life is quite likely to take care of itself. All the less excusable, therefore, in view of these early explanations and emphasis, was the superficial Pharisaic religious life of Christ's time, in which the external was magnified, the internal minimized. Far less excusable such lapses today, and such lapses exist—if not in the same boldness as of old, yet in reality, even if more subtly expressed.

But the one great lesson which stands out in bold relief from this history, is that of the reality and certainty of retribution for sin. It may be long delayed but it will not fail to come at length if sin is not put away. The edict went forth long since—"The soul that sinneth, it shall die"—this, indeed, from the nature of things—the direct result. Only in repentance and turning to God in loyalty and love, is there any safety, and this as truly for nations as for individuals. But as God employed every consistent means to dissuade Israel from her evil course and from the destruction which was the inevitable consequence of sin, so his long suffering love prompts him to do the same today. He is all the time in His Providence and by His Spirit bringing influences to bear to lead men to repentance. Not always do they respond to these influences, just as the Jews

in their obduracy, disregarded the warnings of God, as given through His prophet; but as the threatened retribution came upon them at length, with all its terrible consequences, so it is no less sure to come today if men persist in their sins. The reactive consequences of sin are inevitable. But on the other hand, stern as were Jeremiah's denunciations of the sins of the impenitent, the hope of a dawn of a brighter day to the faithful ones of his time was always held out. Although the Jews must go into captivity, a day of return would also come. Although the city would be razed to the ground, out of its ruins a new city would arise. A succession of worthless kings had disgraced the throne, but in that day to come, true and faithful shepherds would be raised up.

And not only in regard to material things did the prophet encourage them to hope—a spiritual kingdom, and the figure of One who should inaugurate this new and higher and better state of things and be the Light of the world, were foreshadowed. An apostate people had broken the old covenant at Sinai, but in the days to come a new one would be made, not like the old, written on tables of stone, but on the tables of their hearts, an inward, spiritual and everlasting covenant—a covenant of pardon and of grace.

"Behold the days come," saith Jehovah, "that I will make a new covenant with Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. After those days I will put my law in their inward parts and in their heart will I write it. And I will be their God and they shall be my people and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying

'Know Jehovah' for they shall all know me from the least unto the greatest of them," saith Jehovah, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jer. 31:31-34).

What was then foreshadowed to stimulate the hopes of the faithful, came to pass at length in growing degree, first in the restoration of the Jews to their native land under permission of Cyrus and the rebuilding of the city and the temple, and then in the Christian dispensation later, in the establishment of a spiritual kingdom which at length is to triumph over all opposition and in connection with which all the deepest hopes of men are to be realized. And as the Jews in their captivity looked forward to the promised return, so we are assured, just as certainly, in regard to our own entrance at length, into the heavenly land of promise and the New Jerusalem above, where the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple of it, and whose glory constitutes the light of it, if only we hold fast our confidence and persevere to the end.

Thus, dark as things seemed and were to the faithful of Jeremiah's time, better things were in store, which by faith they might perceive. So however dark the skies may seem at times to God's trusting ones now, there is always ground for hope. A brighter day is sure to dawn.

To the believing soul, better times are always in store.

NEHEMIAH

CHAPTER XIII

(Map of Old Testament World)

MANY remarkable characters are set before us in the Bible. Some were notable for their faith, as Abraham; some for their judicial qualities of mind, as Moses and Samuel; some for their prophetic insight, as Amos and Isaiah; some for their spiritual vision, as John and Paul; some for their leadership of men, like Nehemiah, a born leader, of whom I wish to speak at this time.

I have always been an admirer of Nehemiah—for his energy and push, for his resourcefulness and enthusiasm, and for the successful accomplishment of his purposes in the face of the greatest obstacles. I have often wondered whether he has ever been sufficiently appreciated. It will be my aim to help promote this in the minds of those who hear me.

The story of Nehemiah reads more like a romance than sober, matter-of-fact history. The book which bears his name may, in its essential parts, be read at a sitting. Yet what rapid shiftings of scenes there are in it, what vivid narrations of thrilling incidents and events. For piety and courage, for executive ability, for promptness of action, Nehemiah stands unrivaled among the ancient heroes. We see in his case an illustration of how providence cooperates with those whose plans are formed in prayer, which are linked with God's purposes, and which are carried out in dependence upon him.

First of all we need to understand something of the geographical background and the historical settings of the nar-

rative. It opens at about the year 445 B. C. at Susa (Map), residence of the Persian monarchs, Persia being the great world-power of the time. Susa was regarded as an ancient city 4400 years ago. It is mentioned as early as 2400 B. C. and was evidently regarded as old even then. It was famous for its fortress-palace which stood on a great platform 1000 feet square and fifty feet high. The walls of the central hall were eighteen feet thick, and the height of the building perhaps 170 or 180 feet above the ground. Now only huge mounds constitute the remains of all this magnificence. But from results of recent excavations, the outlines of this structure have been made plain. This palace was the scene of the story of Esther, and of the beginning of the story of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah was cup-bearer to the king here, as the narrative opens, a position of great responsibility, bringing him into specially close relations with the monarch. This was about 2300 years ago. Ninety years before this, through the permission and encouragement of King Cyrus, the restoration of the Jews to their native land began. A large number availed themselves of the opportunity. They aimed to rebuild the Temple which had been destroyed fifty years before when Jerusalem was taken and sacked by the Babylonians under Nebuchadrezzar (586 B. C.), and rebuild the city. From time to time thereafter others doubtless returned. It was a long, hard journey, requiring perhaps four months with their slow methods of travel at the time—a great caravan.

Meanwhile communications were kept up between the colonists at the west, and the Jews who remained behind at the east and who very likely constituted the larger number by far. It was evident that the colonists were having a hard time owing to opposition and hindrances from enemies roundabout, who were jealous no doubt, of having a great stronghold

like Jerusalem rebuilt which should far surpass anything of their own in the little nations surrounding.

Having been visited at Susa by some of his countrymen from Jerusalem—for he was himself a Jew, descendant from some of the exiles of years before—Nehemiah learned to his sorrow that the walls of the city, although they had been rebuilt, had been freshly torn down and the gates burned by these enemies, and that grave disorders existed in the land. He was at once seized with a desire to go and help his countrymen to put the city in a condition for defense against these enemies. But the way was not open. He dared not ask permission of the king—it might have been hazardous to do so. So he betook himself to prayer, the only thing he could do, until unexpectedly his opportunity came. One day the king observed signs of anxiety on the face of his trusted cup-bearer and was led to inquire the cause of it. Nehemiah frankly told him. The king became interested and asked him what he wished to do. With a secret prayer for guidance Nehemiah stated his desire, which the king not only granted but also appointed him governor of the province, promised him an escort of horsemen for the journey, and letters to the governors of surrounding provinces to assist him in every possible way.

So he started on the long journey. Traveling on horseback, they could probably reach their destination in at least half the usual time of caravans, or two months, perhaps. Arriving at Jerusalem, he was no doubt received with the honor becoming his rank. The scope of his commission was not known, but the kindly motive of the king was evident in the appointment as governor of one of their own countrymen. For prudential reasons Nehemiah did not at once divulge his plans. There were enemies on the alert who would thwart them if they could. The first thing he did was to learn the con-

dition of the walls and the repairs needed. So on the third night after his arrival he went out secretly with a few companions to inspect them, going out the gate at the southwest corner. Very likely it was a bright moonlight night. We may picture to our minds the scene. The city was a stronghold by nature. On the east side was the valley of the Kidron, on the west and south the valley of Gihon. On the north and west, with no natural defense, attacks were usually made. Of course there were strong walls on these sides of the city, as indeed all around.

There is a charm in visiting ruins by moonlight—as the Alhambra, the Colosseum at Rome, Baalbeck—all glorious scenes. But Nehemiah was not on a pleasure excursion. An earnest purpose filled his soul. They proceeded cautiously eastward. Great masses of masonry were tumbled about. After reaching the southeast corner, they turned north, going as far as the east wall of the Temple. Here such obstructions were encountered that they could go no farther, not even after dismounting from the animals on which they rode. Finally they turned back, retraced their steps, re-entered the city, made their way to their quarters, no one the wiser, but Nehemiah was now prepared for the next step.

Soon he called the leaders together, told them of God's providential guidance in connection with his coming to the city, explained his plans, and appealed to them to work with him in rebuilding the walls and at once. Such energy and enthusiasm did he manifest that the effect was electrical. "Let us arise and build" was the response. Nor was it long before operations began. Nehemiah's plan was, to have everything in readiness to begin on a certain day with all forces at their posts as assigned along the whole course of the wall. They were to work in groups, thirty-five of which are mentioned with

their leaders, each to work on the part of the wall "over against his own house." Thus there was a double motive for the work. The priests were assigned that portion of the wall which was opposite the Temple.

There was one painful exception, however, to mar the general harmony. Certain nobles held back—they did not openly oppose, simply held back, and probably criticised those who did go forward, just as now, when any worthy enterprise is proposed there are those who do the same. They leave others to do the work, and they themselves hold back and criticize those who do their best.

It was a great task which confronted Nehemiah. The laborers were few. An immense amount of rubbish had to be cleared away. The walls were two or three miles in extent. This would not seem to indicate a large city, but it was oriental, with very narrow streets, houses packed closely together, no front yards, all space utilized. The walls to be repaired were several feet thick and many feet high. A number of great gates were to be constructed. Yet hard and difficult as was the undertaking, the community was in a good mood. "All had a mind to work," and all would have gone well but for unexpected difficulties which sprung up. These were of two sorts, those who had their origin within, and those whose source was without.

First, the difficulties within. These sprung from the poverty of the people. They were reduced to serious straits for support. The more favored took advantage of the rest. They drove sharp bargains—loaned money at exorbitant rates of interest, held mortgages on their property, even, practically, upon the liberties of their sons and daughters, who could be sold into slavery if the debts were not paid.

Thus obligations were entered into which could never be met. Such a spirit, heartless, selfish, cruel, and the deep misery occasioned, greatly stirred Nehemiah. He acted promptly. Calling the money-lenders together, he rebuked them, even before the citizens, turning upon them with scathing words. He himself had done his utmost for the people and this without expense to them. He had fed many at his own charges, and yet they were enslaving their brethren. Let them at once cancel their debts, give back the property they had taken, remit the amounts which were due. If they could be reimbursed later, all right, if not let them stand. His appeal was effective. Forced by shame, the money-lenders complied. To clinch all, Nehemiah had them take oath to do as they had agreed. So these internal difficulties were overcome.

Next the difficulties from without. The Jews then, as now, were hated by many. There were the Arabians at the south, the Ammonites at the east, the Samaritans at the north, the Ashdodites at the southwest. Their leaders combined against the Jews, and plotted how to hinder their work. First they sneered at and harassed the people in every way. Knowing that Nehemiah held his commission from the king, they did not dare openly to molest him. But their sneers and petty annoyances availed nothing. The work went right on and even more vigorously. As it advanced, however, and began to promise success, these hostile leaders entered into a league with neighboring tribes if possible to destroy the city. An attack was to be made in the night time, suddenly, and to be followed by a general massacre. Nehemiah learned of this scheme and prepared to receive the enemy. He summoned all who could bear arms, giving them such weapons as were available—spears, bows, swords, and set them in open spaces behind those portions of the wall which were weakest. Then he gave directions as

to methods of defence and made a stirring appeal to them to fight manfully for their hearths and altars.

The enemy, learning that their plans had been discovered and of the measures which had been taken for defence, gave up the proposed attack. But Nehemiah did not relax his vigilance. Half the people were kept at work upon the walls from earliest dawn till the appearing of the stars, their swords at their sides, and their spears near at hand. The other half, fully armed, kept watch behind them. As a still further precaution Nehemiah kept a trumpeter at his side to sound an alarm if at any time it should be necessary.

Having failed in their plans thus far, the enemies next resorted to cunning and deceit. Snares were laid to trap Nehemiah. The first proposition suggested impending danger. It was proposed that he come out of Jerusalem to meet with these leaders for a conference at a place called Ono, thirty miles west of Jerusalem in the plain of Sharon. Perhaps he would hold a parley with them in the interest of peace and their common welfare. But Nehemiah was not to be caught by any such trick. He well knew that they intended harm to him if possible. In reply he sent them this memorable answer: "I am doing a great work so that I cannot come down." Why should the work cease and he go down to them? For the Governor to have left Jerusalem at such a time would have been disastrous.

Nothing daunted, the conspirators tried again and again under various pretexts to prevail upon him to come out for a conference, but each time he returned the same answer as before. Next they wrote him an open letter, telling of rumors everywhere that he was plotting rebellion against the king and to have himself proclaimed ruler. Especially important was

it, therefore, that a conference be held. Nehemiah was not deceived by this device and sent back an indignant denial of these charges.

Finding that none of these schemes would work, they devised another. They sent emissaries to plot mischief within the city, to stir up dissatisfaction, encourage treason, and do all in their power to thwart Nehemiah's plans, even to take his life. (Did the Germans find suggestions here for their corresponding deviltry in this country during the recent war?) Prophets were bribed to do the dirty work. One of them went so far as to shut himself up as if in terror of his life and send word of a plot to murder Nehemiah and himself, suggesting that they conceal themselves in the Holy Place in the Temple for safety. Nehemiah indignantly scorned the proposition, and made another memorable reply: "Should such an one as I flee? and who is there, being such a one as I, would flee to save his life? I will not go in." The place for him as leader was at the front, in the midst of danger, rather than cowardly to be hunting a place for his own safety and demoralizing the whole population by his example.

At length, after all these perplexities, enough to discourage and to dishearten anyone but a Nehemiah, the walls were finished, the gates were set up, and a body of guards for them and for the Temple duly organized, all in fifty-two days. Under existing circumstances, orders for guarding the city were unusually strict. The gates were not opened until the sun was high and guards for the day were in their places. These guards were relieved at night yet not until the gates were closed and barred.

It is not entirely clear from the records as to the order of events after this, but it would seem as if the dedication of the walls, of which an account is given, would naturally occur soon

after their completion, for it seemed a fitting thing that there should be some public recognition of the finishing of the work for the protection of the city. God's favoring providences in it, in the events leading up to it, and his guardian care over the people during its progress, had been very marked. Nehemiah, therefore, determined to signalize the event by a celebration which should be memorable. To this end he summoned the Levites out of the various cities and villages of the province to aid in the exercises. They brought with them their musical instruments. Trained minstrels were summoned also. Trumpets of the priests were sounded on one side and the songs of the minstrels were loud on the other. Even the women and the children joined in the general acclamation, and the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off. Then two processions were formed to move about the walls. Beginning probably on the west side, one of them, under the direction of Nehemiah, was to follow the course of the north wall. The other, in charge of Ezra, who seems to have been in the city at the time, was to follow the course of the south wall. Perhaps they marched on the top of the walls. Both processions were to come together on the east side in the immediate vicinity of the Temple.

At a given signal the two processions began their march, each following the course prescribed. As they came to a stand in front of the Temple, the whole body of singers broke into song, praising the name of the Lord. Meanwhile a portion of the priests descended to the Temple area and there, in the great court, and in the sight of all their brethren, offered sacrifices on the altar of burnt offerings in behalf of the nation.

It is not necessary to rehearse all the events referred to after this. The character of this famous leader, in his motives and spirit, is sufficiently illustrated in the narrative already given. In all that follows he was the same devout, resource-

ful, energetic, enthusiastic person. In the religious awakening which occurred soon after the dedication, both Ezra and Nehemiah had a part and the entire population was aroused. Later, Nehemiah seems to have returned to Susa for a season.

During this period, various abuses developed in Jerusalem. Upon his return from the East Nehemiah at once, and with characteristic vigor, instituted reforms. The neglected services of the Temple were resumed. The desecration of the Sabbath was made to cease. When merchants and various traffickers on that day lodged outside the gates, hoping for opportunity to trade, he sent them word, "If ye do so again I will lay hands on you." One who through the connivance of the high priest, had established himself with his effects in a great chamber in the Temple, was immediately fired, bag and baggage. So one after another, all these abuses were promptly, and with characteristic vigor, corrected.

The story of Nehemiah is full of stimulus and encouragement for every one today who has an earnest purpose in life. He was a man of large and practical faith. This was the source of his inspiration and the secret of his success. It was manifested, for one thing, in his prayerful spirit. If the way did not at once open for the carrying out of his purpose, he betook himself to prayer until it did. In fact, he seemed to pray over every step of the way—the journey, his plans at Jerusalem, dealing with the opposition which he encountered. In this way he reached a solution of every difficulty and successfully accomplished his great mission.

Does some absorbing desire fill any heart here with reference to the future—to make one's life count for the most, for one's own sake, for the sake of one's fellow-men, for the sake of the kingdom, thus to live to a good and noble purpose?

Is it to gain an education in preparation for all this, yet with limited means or none at all with which to do it? The path may not be clear—many obstacles may seem to be in the way—what shall one do? Give up in despair? No. Do rather as Nehemiah did. Give one's self to prayer, and persevere in it until the way does open. Many of the most useful men of the land today hadn't anything when they set out to seek preparation for usefulness. But they persevered in prayer, were willing to help themselves as best they could, had a mind to work, and somehow the resources of God were made available to them and they succeeded.

And God is as ready to bestow his blessing today upon those of a noble purpose. If one's plans are formed in prayer, as were Nehemiah's, and he links them up with God's providence and seeks to carry them out in dependence upon him, there is every reason for pressing forward with confidence. One may not see the way through, at the outset, may see only a step at a time, but the thing to do is to hold fast one's confidence and keep pressing on. One may certainly gain large encouragement from the story of Nehemiah.

Again, Nehemiah's faith was the source of his courage and confidence. He had large physical courage by nature, but this was stimulated and strengthened by his sense of God's presence and favor. He was satisfied that his work was of God. Difficulties only drove him to more earnest efforts. He seemed to be afraid of nothing. Why should he be, with all the resources of God avaliable for his assistance and protection? He expected obstacles to give way and they did. He went forward with confidence, with a courage which nothing could disturb or cause to weaken. And we may experience the same quickening of our courage and confidence in our laudable endeavors today if we will. If satisfied that we are in the path

of duty, we may go forward without fear not only, but with confident expectation that God's blessing will attend us through to a successful conclusion.

Still again, Nehemiah's faith was the source of his enthusiasm. It was an enthusiasm of the right sort, wholesome, sane, over a worthy object, the outgrowth of deep conviction. And this spirit on his part was contagious. Others caught it and were moved to corresponding exertion. All had a mind to work. Sometimes we disparage enthusiasm, especially in the realm of religion. This may be owing to the unintelligent excesses which are sometimes manifested in connection with it, but when it is controlled, sane, growing out of profound conviction, there is no more deserving object of enthusiasm than religion, which has to do with the deepest things of the nature which God has given us, and with ministering service to our fellow men. We are glad to see evidences of reviving interest in business, we give ourselves up to political enthusiasm once in four years at least—why, then, fail to appreciate the fitness and blessed results of a wholesome religious enthusiasm? We need more of it, not fitful and spasmodic, but deep and sustained. Probably one-half of those in the Christian church today were prompted to the step in connection with periodical religious quickening or enthusiasm on the part of God's people. We need more of it of the right sort, rather than less.

Moreover, an absorbing, enthusiastic religious purpose in life, or in any noble and deserving cause, is a most effective protection to one against the temptations which are common to us all, to turn aside from the path of duty, to enter forbidden fields, to waste precious time, to descend to the lower plane of questionable practices, to do things utterly unworthy and base. With such enthusiastic purpose, one will be able to say to the

tempter under whatever guise he appears, as Nehemiah did to those who would tempt him to leave his post of duty: "I am doing a great work so that I cannot come down."

It is our high privilege to cultivate a deeper, stronger faith, that the fruits of it may appear in our lives, as truly as in the life and character of Nehemiah. And when this becomes general, in a church for instance, what a new and mighty impulse is imparted to every form and phase of Christian activity. All will have a mind to work. Each one will be moved to "work over against his own house," i. e. do the work meant for him, or along the line of his particular aptitudes, or that in which he is especially interested, and the church will become a bee-hive of activity, its atmosphere will be inspiring, its spirit contagious.

One live, stirring, enthusiastic Nehemiah can do great things in any church or in any community.

May God raise up more Nehemiahs in our own time.

PART II
Other Old Testament Character Studies

RUTH

CHAPTER XIV

PART II

(Map of Wilderness and Canaan.)

THE little book of Ruth is a literary gem. The story contained in its four chapters is one of the most charming short stories in the Old Testament. It is valuable for the glimpse which it affords into the domestic life of the Israelitish people at the time to which it refers—probably some season of peace in the general period of the Judges; even more so for the lessons it suggests of love and constancy, of purity and integrity.

It is also interesting from its relation to one who was a near ancestress to David and so of David's greater son. Yet richly suggestive and interesting as it is, it may well be questioned whether it has been read as widely and appreciated as thoroughly as it deserves. A story which is told of it, indicating the lack of familiarity with it several generations ago, may not be out of place in this connection. When in our revolutionary period Dr. Benjamin Franklin was our minister to Paris, it is said that he was a member of a literary society in that city which was made up of many of the nobility. At one of their meetings the conversation turned upon the subject of pastoral poetry. After considerable discussion and the mention of the names of several authors, the doctor offered to read the translation of a pastoral for their entertainment. With a few verbal changes he read the book of Ruth. All were charmed by it, pronouncing it the finest they had ever

heard, and inquired as to the author. Imagine their surprise, perhaps chagrin, when he told them that it was from the Bible!

We know nothing as to the author of the book or the date of it. Evidently it was written considerably later than the time of the Judges when its incidents are supposed to have taken place. There is difference of opinion also as to whether the story is strictly historical, or somewhat in the nature of a historical romance with historical background and the scenes and characters to some extent idealized, most Bible scholars inclining to the latter view. Whichever view is held, it does not affect the moral character of the book or render its lessons less vital and true.

It was during one of the seasons of peace in the general period of the Judges that the incidents of the book of Ruth are supposed to have taken place. There arose a famine in the land. It was keenly felt in thousands of homes and various expedients were resorted to for relief. Some sought it in distant places where there was plenty. When famines occurred in the time of Abraham and Jacob, Egypt was the land of plenty to which they turned. Among those who at this time were suffering want was a man named Elimelech. Unable to make a living on his little plot of ground near Bethlehem, in Judah, he decided to take his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, and go to the land land of Moab (Map) where the soil was good, and plenty at that time prevailed. It was a tableland region which lay east of the Dead Sea. It was 3000 feet above the Mediterranean, or 4300 feet above the Dead Sea, which was itself about 1300 feet lower than the Mediterranean.

Accordingly this little family set out on the journey. They traveled first to the northeast to the plain of Jericho (Map), a journey of a day or two, the road descending all the way. Then crossing the Jordan—fording it probably, for in ordinary

times the river was fordable here—they journeyed southward and upward to their destination. There, among the semi-nomadic and idolatrous tribes of the country they made their home. For a time everything went well. Then a great trial came. Elimelech, the husband and father, died, and Naomi was left a widow and the two sons fatherless. No doubt they found friends in their trouble, although Naomi must have longed for the sympathy of home friends at such a time. But the way was not yet clear for them to return, though a number of years may have passed. Not long after, the two sons, now grown to young manhood, became interested in having homes of their own, and married daughters of the land. The relations of Naomi with her two daughters-in-law proved to be exceptionally pleasant, and they grew into each other's confidence and affection.

But the happiness of these two homes and of the mother in her sons was not of long continuance. It was not a great while before the two sons were taken ill and one after the other passed away. Thus, both the young wives were left widows and Naomi was again stricken. And now the three widows entered more deeply into sympathy than ever, but the question of support became a serious one at length, while as for Naomi, her heart began to turn longingly to her native land and her early home friends. The season of famine had now passed, so she resolved to return. The two daughters-in-law were minded to accompany her—at least they would go with her as far as the border of their own land. Farewells are seldom spoken in the home in the far east. The one departing is usually accompanied by friends for some distance on the road. So it often is when missionaries leave their stations for a visit home—the natives frequently go with them a number of miles on the way and there bid them adieu and God-speed on their journey. If

it is known when they are to return, they often go out a number of miles and escort them in.

As Naomi and the two daughters-in-law reach the border of the land, Naomi, with thoughtful and unselfish regard for their welfare, frankly set the situation before them and urged them to return to their homes rather than go on with her as they were inclined to do. Much as she loved them and hard as the separation would be, she thought it would be better for them to be among friends in their own land than go with her and be foreigners in a strange land.

Finally, one of the young women, Orphah by name, decided to act upon this advice and return to her kindred and friends. But the other, whose name was Ruth, still clung to Naomi and nothing could dissuade her from going with her. These were her eloquent and pathetic words:

"Entreat me not to leave thee and to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest I will go and where thou lodgest I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God. Where thou diest I will die and there will I be buried. Jehovah do so to me and more also if aught but death part thee and me."

There was no resisting such an appeal as that, so Ruth and Naomi went on their way. It was not many days before they reached the Jordan, crossed it, and later came up to Bethlehem. To Naomi it was returning to her old home, but it was coming into entirely new surroundings for Ruth. The people recognized Naomi as their old neighbor, although she had greatly changed during the ten years of her absence and many could hardly believe it was she at all. And conditions in the old neighborhood were doubtless not a little changed also. Some had moved away, new people had come in, some had died. No doubt Naomi keenly realized the difference. Her reception,

though kind, was perhaps not all she had anticipated. She may have been oppressed by a fresh sense of her loss since she had left them. All this led her to say: "Call me no more Naomi for the Almighty hath dealt bitterly with me. I went out full but he has brought me back empty."

Still, notwithstanding all, Naomi had a brave, loyal heart, and felt assured that God's kindly providence would continue to be round about her. So she and Ruth began to consider what they should do in order to get along, for it was not a great while before they were in sore straits. Whereupon Ruth proved her real nobility of character by proposing to go out into the harvest fields and glean after the reapers. She was ready and willing to do anything she could for their support and this seemed to be the only course which was open. For it was a law of the land that in harvesting grain or in gathering grapes or olive berries, something should be left for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.

The field in which Ruth gained permission to glean belonged to a man named Boaz, a man of some standing in the neighborhood and of large possessions. As it drew near the noon-hour of the first day, the proprietor himself appeared upon the scene. It afterwards appeared that he was a kinsman of Elimelech, Naomi's former husband, though this was not known at this time. As Boaz came along saluting his workmen as he passed, he observed a stranger among the gleaners. Struck with her appearance he was led to make inquiry of his steward concerning her. The steward told him the story of Ruth as he had learned it. Boaz became interested, called Ruth to him and entered into conversation with her, in the course of which he bade her do all her gleaning on his land, and took pains to indicate certain priviledges which she might enjoy there, at the

same time giving directions to the young men that she be treated with civility and respect.

This unexpected kind and considerate treatment from the proprietor touched the heart of Ruth and she gave expression to her gratitude. Thereupon he said to her, showing that he had a devout spirit, "The Lord recompense thy work and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel under whose wings thou art come to trust."

At the noonday luncheon Ruth was invited to participate and was treated with all courtesy. Boaz gave private instructions to some of the reapers to leave a few extra stalks of grain for the gleaner. There were other interesting experiences that day which need not be rehearsed in detail. Ruth was able to take a surprisingly large amount of grain home that night as a result of her first day's gleaning.

When she narrated to Naomi all the circumstances and incidents of the day, the latter both recognized from the name that Boaz was her husband's kinsman, and was shrewd enough to discern the motive for his exceptional kindness to Ruth, whom she advised to accept his invitation to continue to glean in his fields. This continued for two or three weeks, and Ruth and Boaz were frequently thrown together. Very possibly Boaz began to anticipate with growing interest these meetings with the young gleaner, and it is also possible that Ruth may have endeavored to render herself as attractive in dress and personal appearance as possible—perhaps instinctively, perhaps for other reasons. This is not stated in the narrative—it is only speculation—yet possibly not unreasonable in the circumstances and in the light of later events.

Meanwhile Naomi remembered there was a Jewish law by which an unmarried man was placed under some obligation toward a childless widow of a near kinsman, and it occurred

to her to employ a little strategy to help matters along to a conclusion. Perhaps she thought Boaz was inclined to diffidence and needed a little encouragement. The plan she proposed, though hardly in keeping with modern ideas of propriety, was not out of keeping with the usages of that age nor in any way unbecoming to the pure-minded. The outcome was all that Naomi had hoped. It was a quaint courtship of the olden time. However diffident Boaz may have been—if there was diffidence—he finally rose to the exigency and proposed to Ruth to name the happy day. We do not know how she received the proposal—very likely she said something to this effect: "O Mr. Boaz, this is so sudden—so unexpected" and pleaded for time to consider. She evidently overcame any "surprise" she may have experienced, and arrangements went forward for the wedding day.

There were some necessary legal steps to be taken before the way was perfectly clear for Boaz to go forward but he immediately got busy, all obstacles were removed, the way opened, and the marriage was celebrated amid public congratulations. Ruth's struggles with poverty were at an end, her trials were over. Now she has a home, position and plenty, and we may well believe that Naomi shared in her daughter-in-law's good fortune and that ample provision was made for her sustenance as long as she lived. After their long series of reverses, misfortunes, trials, providence seemed to favor them and all was happiness and peace.

Thus we have the simple narrative of Ruth, suggestive, touching, a beautiful idyllic love story of the olden time.

What was the writer's aim in the story? This does not seem to be altogether clear. Was it to introduce to us the family from which David descended? Some think so. The book of Samuel contains no particulars concerning his ancestry.

Was it simply to sketch a picture of the home life of the Israelites in that age and to show how the true religious spirit may be carried into all the details of it now as then? Or again, was it to set forth the deep fidelity of a woman's love toward a sorrowing companion? Certain it is that this is most effectually illustrated in Ruth's case. It was pure love which prompted her to cling to her mother-in-law. Nothing else could have inspired such a purpose in the circumstances, for there was nothing in the way of material advantage to hope for in so doing, as Naomi plainly told her.

Or, as an increasing number of Bible scholars seem to think, may the object of the book have been to present, for the time when it was written, a strong witness agains the race prejudice of the Jews? Ruth, a daughter of Moab, a native therefore of a country religiously hostile to Israel, whatever their political relations at that time, obtained an honorable position among Jehovah's people. No such moral as this is definitely pointed, yet as a Jew should hear or read the story of this young woman—as good and noble as any woman of his own race—he could hardly fail to see the utter inconsistency of excluding her from the privileges of the Jewish worship, and his prejudices could hardly fail to melt away.

Whatever may have been the specific aim of the author, the story of Ruth has its own lessons and messages for today—for the Christian and the unconverted alike, and to one or two of them we may well refer in closing,

1. One is in regard to the changeful nature of our earthly life and experience and the true spirit in which to meet all. Some lives seem to move on evenly, with little variation from day to day and from year to year. But these are the exceptions. Into most lives many and great changes come, sometimes in rapid succession. The practical question is as to how

we are to bear ourselves in the midst of them. When Elimelech and his family left Bethlehem for a home in Moab, although it was a change from home scenes into a life among strangers and with heathenish surroundings, the family was still intact. But ere long it was broken. The husband and father passed away. Then the sons married and later still both died. What a change for Naomi—left alone now away from kindred and in a foreign land, with no strong arm to lean upon, only her daughters-in-law to comfort her. When at length she returned to her native land it was in poverty and things were not as they once were. And yet how frequently reverses just as marked come to those we love, possibly to ourselves. Those in affluence are suddenly brought low and ever afterwards are obliged to struggle. Friends are taken, the home circle broken and life never afterwards seems just the same to those who survive. Disappointments come and the whole course of one's life is altered. A thousand circumstances unanticipated bring changes into life which alter its whole aspect.

What shall the trusting one do?—give way to all, settle down to depression and discouragement, begin to question the goodness and loving personal interest of the Heavenly Father? O No! These changing scenes by no means indicate the withdrawal of His thoughtful love and care. They may mean, rather, that He loves his children too well to change the course of events by His providence. Perhaps one needs just the discipline, just the testing of faith which such trials are calculated to bring, whether he realizes it or not. God may be dealing far better with one than he knows at the time. Perhaps the highest possibilities of the spiritual nature could not so well be realized in any other way. At all events, God's grace is sufficient to enable one not only to bear up in the midst of all, but even to grow stronger and develop the Christian graces of

character as never before. Times of trial may be the best growing times.

The thing to do, in short, is to keep on trusting, assured that the Lord never slumbers nor sleeps, never loses sight of His own, His eye is ever upon us. It is to look beyond the immediate present and think of the glories in reserve for the faithful.

Sometimes the skies were overcast for Naomi, she could not always see clearly, sometimes her faith may have wavered temporarily. But God was still with her all the time though unseen. His guiding hand was never withdrawn, the hand of His bounty never stayed. And the Lord is no less mindful of His own today. They may seem to themselves to be having a hard time—it may sometimes even seem as if they had been set aside, side-tracked, forgotten. Yet all this time the Lord has them in remembrance, and will in due time bring everything out all right. Things in our experience which may seem very trying, God may have the highest kind of a providential purpose in, in the way of warning, or safety, or blessing, or encouragement to trust. Paul's thorn in the flesh which tried him sorely, and for the removal of which he prayed, he learned at length was intended to guard him against spiritual pride to which he was in danger of being tempted. It was not removed, but grace was given him to bear it and he was grateful even for the buffeting thorn. The glory of our faith is that to them that love God, all things—changes, disappointments, mistakes, trials, thorns in the flesh, failures—work together for good to them, if they receive them in becoming spirit and seek from them the spiritual good they were intended to impart.

2. A final thought is in regard to the significance of Ruth's choice, how she met the great crisis experience, or turning point of her life. The time came to her at length, as sooner or later it comes to us all, when she was brought face to face with

life's greatest question, not in that form directly, but it involved it. She was called to make a decision which would be of far-reaching consequences both for the present life and that to come. It was a time of crisis, a turning point. Would she join her fortunes with Naomi, which meant, in the circumstances, also to accept Naomi's God and live the religious life of Naomi? Or would she turn back to her old life with its idolatrous surroundings? No doubt there was a great struggle in her mind over things to be given up and over the untried future if she went with Naomi. At last she came out clear and decided. She would be true to herself and her own highest instincts, cling to Naomi whom she loved and at the same time accept Naomi's God as her own. So she made the great decision.

Such times come to us all. Various experiences or circumstances lead up to them—trial, loss, influence of friends, our own serious thoughtfulness. We may have thought of the question for years. It has been left unsettled all this time. At length we have been brought face to face with it. In general this crisis time is when we are conscious in unusual degree of the pressure of the spirit of God upon us—when we feel definitely that we ought to decide and decide aright, that we ought to delay no longer. That time may be now, the present moment. It may be that conscience is pressing as never before. It is the time to decide. It is perilous to turn aside from, to ignore the call, to put it off until some supposedly more convenient season. It is a hazardous thing to resist the Spirit at such a time. The call may not come in so clear and strong a way again. In a special sense, "Now is the accepted time."

What is it that hinders? Is it because one thinks there are many things in the Bible which he does not understand? Is it because one is waiting for more feeling, or to feel as some

one else says he has felt? Is it because of various things which it is thought must be given up? All these qusetions used to trouble me. Now I see clearly as I did not then, that there is nothing in any one of them to be a serious hindrance. The only real obstacle is one's own stubborn will. When that gives way the whole question will be settled, and the new life one thus enters upon he will never want to give up.

ESTHER

CHAPTER XV

(Map of Old Testament World)

THERE are some very notable peculiarities about the Book of Esther. The name of God is not mentioned in it, nor are there any titles to express Him. There is no reference to the Hebrew religion, or to any requirement of the Mosaic law on which it is based. Neither Jerusalem nor the temple is alluded to, nor is any ceremonial of the Hebrew worship even hinted at. There is one reference to a fast, but nothing is said about prayer.

But even if the name of God is not mentioned in the book, the idea of God is there, and no one can read it with open mind without being sensible of it. Though prayer is not spoken of, it is clearly implied. If direct religious teachings are absent, the religious spirit is there. Esther speaks only as we should expect a religious-minded woman would. The permanent value of the book is that it gives us a revelation of God acting in His providence, humbling the proud, exalting the lowly who trust in Him, and effecting a great deliverance—the deliverance divine, but the means employed human.

The scene of the narrative is Susa (Map), or Shushan, the fortress palace in it. (See description under Nehemiah.) In excavations of the place many records have been found of Darius, whose unsuccessful invasion of Greece was followed by another on the part of Xerxes, who has been identified with Ahasuerus of the book. The plot of the story is laid in his reign (485-464 B. C.)—somewhere, perhaps, from 483 to 470. The extent of the Persian kingdom at this time was stated to be

from India on the east to Ethiopa on the southwest. It embraced 127 provinces. Whether the narrative is authentic history, or pure fiction for a purpose, or is based upon historical facts like some of our modern historical novels, is not altogether clear. The latter view seems to predominate among Biblical scholars. If it is not literal history, it at least seems to be true to the spirit of the times, while the great lessons which it teaches stand out distinctly from it, and this is the thing of chiefest importance. The authorship is also uncertain.

The narrative is simple, unartificial, graphic. It shows that many Jews were at that time scattered through the empire, or certain portions of it, descendants, probably, of those of the captivity. The main characters in the story are five:

1. Ahasuerus, the king, supposed to be the same as Xerxes of secular history, a typical, despotic, Oriental king.
2. Vashti, his chief wife or favorite, and queen.
3. Haman, his prime minister, grand vizier or chief officer.
4. Mordecai, a Jew, an official of the palace.
5. Esther, a beautiful Jewish maiden, niece of Mordecai, and an orphan whom he had adopted as his own daughter.

The story is very dramatic. The chapters seem to be so arranged as to present a number of scenes or pictures as if in a play upon the stage.

1. In the opening chapter we are introduced to a banquet which degenerates finally into a drunken revel. King Ahasuerus, in the third year of his reign, in order to display his wealth and magnificence, made a great feast to all his princes, nobles and various officials in the one-hundred and twenty-seven provinces of his vast realm. He invited them by groups to his citadel palace, the banquet extending over a period of six months. At the conclusion of this, a feast was made for all the men of the

palace, great and small, and at the same time Vashti, the queen, made a feast for the women.

On the seventh and last day of the feast, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he conceived the idea of having his queen, who was fair to look upon, brought into the men's banquet hall, that they might behold her beauty, and he sent chamberlains to fetch her. But the queen was evidently a very sensible woman and had no idea of becoming the gazing stock of a crowd of half-drunken men and she refused to go. Her refusal increases our admiration and respect for her, but the king and his counsellors took a very serious view of it. Not only was it an affront to the king, and disobedience, but the effect of it as it was noised about might prove to be most disastrous, encouraging the women of the realm generally to a spirit of independence and perhaps revolt against their husbands—a terrible state of things to contemplate! They might become unmanageable—there would be no living with them.

So, after grave discussion of this tremendous question, and both to punish Queen Vashti for her disobedience and prevent the anticipated uprising of the women, it was resolved to make an example of her by deposing her; also to send forth a decree post haste throughout all the provinces to announce the fact, stating also that all women should give honor to their husbands, both great and small, and that every man should be ruler in his own house—thus would the threatened peril be averted. It was also arranged that the most attractive young women of the realm should be brought together at Susa, from whom the king was to select a successor to Vashti. This was the situation at the close to this first scene—Vashti deposed, the momentous decree sent forth, and steps taken to secure a suitable successor.

2. In the next scene we are introduced to Mordecai, a Jew, whose ancestors were among the captives from Jerusalem at

the time of its destruction and fall under Nebuchadrezzar (586 B. C.). He was an official occuping some important position in the palace. In his family was a niece, Esther by name, whose parents had died and whom Mordecai had adopted as his own daughter. She was exceptionally fair and attractive. So when many maidens were entering into competition for the high office from which Queen Vashti had been deposed, it occurred to Mordecai that it might be well for Esther also to enter the lists. We may well believe that for a modest young woman to enter into a beauty contest like that would be extremely distasteful, but Esther seems to have been persuaded at length, no doubt to please her adopted father, although she very likely was without the slightest idea of achieving success.

But, no doubt very much to her own surprise, the king, as he looked upon her, was delighted in her. The outcome was that she was made the king's queen. At the suggestion of Mordecai she had not made her race known.

It seems that about this time, two of the king's chamberlains, owing probably to some personal grievance, had entered into a conspiracy against the king's life. This becoming known to Mordecai, he communicated the fact to Esther, who reported it to the king. When it was found, upon investigation, to be true, the conspirators were sentenced to execution forthwith, and the facts were entered in the records of the realm.

3. In the third scene, Haman, the Agagite, a descendant of the Amalekites, hereditary enemies of the Jews, appears upon the scene as one who has been promoted by the king to become his chief officer, prime minister, grand vizier, or secretary of state. All the officials of the palace thereupon did reverence to him—for so the king had commanded—all except Mordecai. To him it may have seemed too much like rendering divine homage to a mere man to prostrate himself before him, and he

refused to do it. When Haman perceived this he was very angry, so much so that he thought scorn, we read, to lay hands upon or to punish Mordecai alone. He purposed in his heart, rather, the destruction of the whole hated race of Jews scattered through the kingdom, but to carry out this fell purpose, he must needs secure the approval of the King. So upon a favorable occasion he broached the subject to him. I can imagine him addressing the king somewhat in this fashion: "O King, there is an alien race scattered among the provinces who are hostile to the king's interests. They disregard the laws of the realm; they set at naught the customs of the people; they have a different religion. Now, what is to hinder them from becoming a serious menace to the peace of the kingdom—what is there to prevent them from rising, on some occasion, against our people and massacring them? I suggest, therefore, that we anticipate any such possibility by appointing a day when our people shall rise against them, massacre them, and confiscate their property and thus bring a large sum of money into the royal treasury."

It was not difficult to persuade the king by such a presentation, and the necessary authorization was given. A decree was sent forth through all the provinces that upon a certain day there should be a general uprising against the Jews, including women and children, with confiscation of their property. This done, the king and Haman sat down to drink—a very fitting thing to do after the diabolical scheme they had concocted.

4. The distress everywhere occasioned by this cruel edict is set before us in the scene following. In every province there was great mourning and fasting and weeping and wailing. In Shushan, especially, it was keenly felt. Mordecai, as he learned what had been done, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and cried with a loud and bitter cry. And he came even before the king's gate, not entering, however,

which none might do in such a garb. When this was reported to Esther by her maidens and attendants she sent raiment to clothe him in place of the sackcloth which he wore, but he refused to receive it. Thereupon Esther charged one of the king's chamberlains to go to him privately and learn the meaning of it all. He did so, and then Mordecai told him frankly of all that had happened, and the exact sum which Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasury for permission to destroy the Jews. He also sent Esther a copy of the decree which had gone out from the palace, and sent word charging her to go in unto the king to make supplication in behalf of the people.

Then Esther returned answer to Mordecai to the effect that it was a well understood rule in the palace that whoever—man or woman—should come into the king's presence in the inner court without being called, did so at the risk of his life, unless the king held out the golden scepter in token of his favor. Esther added that she had not been called before the king for a whole month.

When Mordecai received this message he returned this answer: That Esther must not hope, herself, to escape more than all other Jews; that if she altogether held her peace, he had faith to believe that deliverance would come from some other quarter, but she and her father's house would perish. "And who knoweth," he continued, "whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"—this the providential significance of her elevation to the high station which she held.

Then Esther returned answer that Mordecai should gather all the Jews together that are in Shushan, and fast—neither eating nor drinking for three days. "I also," she said, "and my maidens will fast in like manner (and no doubt prayer was coupled with it), and so will I go in unto the king even though not according to the law, and if I perish, I perish." Noble

answer; she would do her duty even at the hazard of her life. So Mordecai went his way and did all that Esther commanded him.

5. We turn in the next scene to the venture which Esther made at the seeming risk of her life in appearing before the king. Arraying herself as attractively as possible, she went into his presence as he sat upon the throne. And it was so, when he saw his queen standing in his court, she obtained favor in his sight, and he held out the golden scepter in token thereof. Then he inquired of her: "What wilt thou, Queen Esther, and what is thy request—it shall be granted thee even to the half of my kingdom." Esther was not yet ready to risk all and only asked that the king with his chief officer, Haman, come to a banquet which she had prepared. So the king and Haman did as requested, but even then she was not ready—the interests involved were so great that she would run no risk by making her request prematurely. So when the king again inquired what her desire was, she simply asked that they come again the next day and then she would tell him all.

That day Haman was filled with gladness. Not only had he been promoted to the highest position within the gift of the king, but he deemed it a special honor that he alone should be invited to a banquet along with the king, by the queen. But when he saw that Mordecai paid no attention to him, made no move to honor him, he felt humiliated. So he gathered in a few special friends and to them and to his wife he poured out his grief. He recounted the glory of his riches and all the favors which the king had heaped upon him above all others, and added that Queen Esther, for the second time, had invited him to a banquet with her and the king. "Yet all this availeth me nothing so long as I see Mordecai sitting at the king's gate." His friends, however, did not regard the matter as seriously

as he did. "Let a gallows be made," they said, "fifty cubits high, and in the morning speak to the king about it, have Mordecai hung thereon, and then go merrily to the banquet." This struck Haman as a very happy thought, and he forthwith caused the gallows to be erected.

6. In this scene we have a picture of a restless night for the king. For some reason he could not sleep, so, to while away the time, he commanded that the book of records of the kingdom and his administration be brought in and read to him. This was done. Among other things the incident was noted of the two chamberlains who had plotted against the king's life, and the report of the same by Mordecai which had saved his life. Then it occurred to him to ask if any honor or dignity had been bestowed upon Mordecai for this fidelity. It was reported that nothing had been done.

In the morning Haman appeared in the court. He had one thing in his mind and the king another in his. Haman would gain permission to hang Mordecai, while the king was considering how he might honor him. Neither knew what the other was thinking about. The king was the first to speak. "Haman," he said, "what shall be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor?" Then Haman said to himself, "Surely that must mean me, for upon whom would the king delight to bestow honor more than upon myself?" So he made answer accordingly, indicating the thing in particular which he would be glad to have for himself. "For the man whom the king delighteth to honor," said he, "let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and let the horse and apparel be delivered over to one of the king's most noble princes that he may array the man whom the king delighteth to honor and cause him to ride on horseback through the streets of the city, and proclaim before him: "Thus is it done

to the man whom the king delighteth to honor." Then the king said to Haman: "Make haste and do even so unto Mordecai the Jew that sitteth in the king's gate."

And there was nothing for Haman to do but to comply! He dared not remonstrate. So he did as he was bidden—went through the motions at least—ungrateful task that it was. After this he hastened home to his wife and friends—mourning and having his head covered. He told the story of what had befallen him, but it was sorry comfort that he received this time—only that if he had begun to fall before Mordecai, he could not probably prevail against him. And even as he talked messengers came to take him to Esther's second banquet. Although in no condition of mind to go, he dared not refuse and braced himself up as best he could for the occasion.

7. At the second banquet the king again inquired of Esther as to her request. Then Esther, the time now being ripe, in her judgment, indeed the psychological moment, answered and said: "If I have found favor in thy sight, O king, and if it please thee, let my life be given me at my petition and that of my people at my request, for we are sold, I and my people, to be slain, to perish. If we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen I would have held my peace, although the adversary could not have compensated for the king's damage." Then in surprise the king said to Esther: "Who is he and where is he who durst in his heart presume to do so?" And Esther said: "An adversary and an enemy, even this wicked Haman."

Then Haman was afraid. The king, in his anger, arose from the banquet and retired to the palace garden. Then Haman stood up and made request of the queen for his life, for he saw what was likely to come. When the king came in and saw Haman fallen upon the queen's couch, misapprehending its meaning, he gave expression to his astonishment and his anger. At once

attendants covered Haman's face, and one of them said: "Behold the gallows fifty cubits high upon which Haman thought to hang Mordecai, who had before spoken good for the king and saved his life." And the king said: "Go hang Haman thereon." So Haman was hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's wrath was pacified. Instinctively we feel, "served him right." He richly deserved his fate.

8. In the last scene Mordecai is promoted. He becomes prime minister in the place of Haman. The king gives to him the ring he had taken from the finger of the executed official. The house of Haman was given to Esther, who set Mordecai over it.

But Esther's work was not yet done. The decree had gone forth for the massacre of her people on a certain day. So she besought the king with tears to revoke the order and thus counteract the mischief which Haman had wrought. Her proposal was that another and reverse decree go forth. The royal permission was given—not to reverse the decree, which could not be done, since the laws of the Medes and Persians never changed—but giving the Jews everywhere permission to defend themselves, and a decree was sent throughout all the provinces to that effect—that the Jews might defend themselves from the assaults of their enemies.

Then Mordecai went forth clothed with the high honors which had come to him, and the people of Shushan shouted and were glad. And wherever the decree went the effect was the same. Many in the land, says the record, became Jews, for the fear of the Jews was fallen upon them—as before the fear of the people had fallen upon the Jews. So when the day for the proposed massacre came, when the Jews' enemies hoped to rule over them, it turned to the contrary. The Jews gathered themselves in the cities, and many of the officials helped them because

the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them. They smote their enemies right and left all through the realm and thousands of them perished—seventy-five thousand in all. Even in Shushan, the palace, about 500 were slain, including the ten sons of Haman, yet in all cases the Jews refrained from taking spoil.

Sometimes the criticism is made that this was monstrous, barbarous, unworthy the people of God, but we must not forget the age in which this is reported to have taken place—nearly twenty-five hundred years ago, long before the light of Christianity had flooded the earth, and we must judge them by the standards of that age rather than by our own. Such things were not uncommon then. Furthermore, the Jews were brought up with the idea that it was all right to hate their enemies, even to slay them under provocation. All this should relieve the situation, while still our minds revolt at the idea of such bloodshed and slaughter. What shall be said about the Teutonic and Turkish outrages in this age of Christian enlightenment!

The season in which all this bloody work was completed and the deliverance of the Jews effected was made a time of feasting and gladness. And this is given as the origin of the feast of Purim of the Jews, which is observed by them annually still about the middle of the month of March. Letters were sent out by Mordecai and Esther enjoining upon the Jews the institution of the feast, to be observed henceforth in commemoration of their deliverance.

The book closes with the declaration that Mordecai was next to the king in authority, and great among all the Jews, and that he sought the good and the peace of all his people—in striking contrast to the situation at the opening of the story. The book carries great lessons upon its very face.

1. As to the fact, here illustrated, of a divine Providence in human affairs, God shaping and controlling events in right-

euosness for ends of His own, the good of His trusting people, and the triumph of His kingdom. Things do not merely happen in this world—there is a God back of all, carrying out by means of these events an intelligent purpose. He is not seen, but His guiding hand appears, and to such as love Him He causes all things to work together for their good. Or, as Lowell beautifully expresses it: "Standeth God within the shadow, Keeping watch above His own." We cannot see Him but He is there. We may not understand how He is able to bring about the results He does, but He does it. Nor does He interfere with the freedom of his creatures—they act of their own free will, as did the various characters in the narrative, and as we all do today. But back of and above all there is this shaping, over-ruling Providence working to a definite end. In and all through the interlocking incidents of the story, God was working for the ultimate deliverance of His people. All of which goes to show that there is such a thing as divine Providence in human affairs, and, whether we realize it or not, all the time working for the promotion of God's own high ends and the final triumph of His kingdom.

This should be a distinct and definite encouragement to those who are inclined to be pessimistic in regard to the progress of righteousness in the world, when some seem to think that Christianity has broken down. But Christianity has not broken down. Some of its professed adherents may have broken down, but Christianity itself is as virile as ever it has been. None of the great evils of the world are too mighty or too great for God's power to overcome. We may not understand why He did not hinder the passions of men from breaking forth and bringing on the great war with all its unspeakable horrors, but whether we realize it or not, or are able to explain how, His agencies were all the time at work to over-rule all for good. Already we are

able to discern much in the way of results for the good of humanity in the future, and more and more as we recede from the war period will this be recognized. Human progress, in spite of all, has been moving forward with leaps and bounds. It has been a terrible price to pay, but God will not fail in his over-ruling purposes of good.

2. A practical and encouraging thought is suggested by Mordecai's message to Esther: "Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" In God's providence she had been exalted to a high and influential station. But in the thought of Mordecai it was not for her sake alone—rather for a great purpose—even to meet the dread emergency which had arisen and save the Jewish people of the provinces. Would she be true to her opportunity and responsibility? Everything depended on her fidelity. Grandly she rose to the occasion and her people were saved. Suppose she had failed and her people had been massacred—could she have been entirely guiltless?

We are wont to think that God raises up certain selected one for great missions—Joseph, Moses, Paul, Luther, Washington, Lincoln—which is no doubt true. But we overlook the fact that the principle is the same for all. God calls every one, even the humblest, to some mission, some important work for which he is specially fitted, as truly as He called these great and notable characters. The service may not be conspicuous, may not be heralded, yet it is important and real and God recognizes it if one is faithful. One may have some special gift, of song, or leadership, or kindly ministry, or literary ability, or has means more or less. What will he do with these gifts, his money, his influence, his varied capabilities—employ them in promoting his own personal ends simply—pleasure, profit, advancement in some way? Or shall he dedicate himself and all that he has to

God and His service and to serving his fellow men, recognizing them all and the opportunity to serve as having been given him of God or entrusted to him for a high providential purpose and seeking with all fidelity to meet it?

How grand and inspiring the thought that in the providence of God we are all, individually, even the humblest, those with the fewest gifts and seemingly the least opportunity, called to some special service for him, if we will. We may, in our measure, be co-workers with God as truly as were Esther, Moses, Luther or Lincoln. Who knoweth whether one is not called to his kingdom of opportunity and to the special service he may render, for such a time as that in which he lives?

As Esther recognized her call and sought faithfully to meet it, so let us do likewise in our day and generation and the blessing of God will attend us.

JONAH

CHAPTER XVI

(Map of Palestine, and O. T. World)

THE book of Jonah is one of the three most misunderstood, perverted, and abused books of the Bible—Daniel and Revelation being the other two. Claims have been made for it of which its author never dreamed. Things have been read into it or drawn out of it for which there is absolutely no warrant. In consequence it has often been subjected to ridicule; the mention of it suggests only a big fish story and is greeted by an incredulous smile. All this because it is not appreciated in its deep significance and the method employed by the author in setting forth his message. As a matter of fact, strange as the book is, standing alone and in a class by itself, it is one of the noblest books in the Old Testament, and rises more nearly to the Christian spirit of the New than any other. Nowhere else is such stress laid upon the fatherhood of God and the universality of his redemptive purpose, until we come to the life and teachings and spirit of our Lord himself. Such a book is well worth our study, and to help to rescue it from the reproach and odium which seem to have fallen upon it, and to assist to a better appreciation of it and its great message, will be my endeavor at this time.

We have no clue to the date of the book. The Jonah, son of Amittai, referred to, probably lived in the reign of Jeroboam II of the northern kingdom, somewhere about the year 750 B. C., but the book itself was evidently not written until a long time after this—some think about two or three hundred years

B. C. Nor do we know the name of its author. He was clearly one of the greatest of the later prophets in his conception of God, His spirit and purpose.

As to the aim of the book, it was manifestly to rebuke the narrow, bigoted, and intolerant spirit of the Jews toward the heathen peoples about them, but especially their enemies and oppressors. It was to establish the truth that the love of God was not confined to the Jews exclusively—which was the popular thought among them—but was extended to all mankind, even including the heathen. He desires all, as well as the Jews, to be saved. But the latter, instead of recognizing the high mission to which they had been called of being a prophet nation to the world, to teach mankind of the one true God and his worship, had ignored it and gone so far in the other direction that they could only regard the Gentiles or heathen with a most bitter and unreasonable hate, upon whom they hoped and prayed and confidently expected that the judgment and vengeance of God would speedily fall and they be destroyed. This was Jonah's spirit and he was intended to represent or be an embodiment of the sentiments of his race. If we would understand the book we need to keep this in mind.

Two views are held in regard to the book. It is important to understand both, then it will be one's privilege to accept for himself whichever view most commends itself.

1. The first view is that the book is historical, that it was so intended by its author, and that all the things narrated in it, impossible as some of them may seem, literally occurred. This, until comparatively recent years, was the generally accepted view, and it is still held by not a few. But many serious difficulties connected with maintaining such a view have come to be recognized. There is a conspicuous absence of certain details which a regular historian would have hardly felt at

liberty to ignore, many questions which could not consistently have been left unanswered, such as the name of the King of Nineveh, the nature of the sins of the Ninevites, the earlier and later history of the prophet, and the details of his preaching. Then, too, many grotesquely supernatural incidents are introduced in the story such as we find nowhere else in all the Bible—the sudden appearance of the tempest, the sudden conversion of the sailors, Jonah's preservation alive in the great fish, the marvelous effect of his reluctant preaching, the sudden growth and end of the gourd. Such difficulties as these must be met, if the historical view is to be held. The fact that they have not been met, and the absurd explanations which have been resorted to account for the difficulties, have been the occasion or cause of widespread skepticism about the book as a historical document, and of no end of ridicule which many have heaped upon it.

This is one view, the older, the distinctly historical—that the narrative is literal history, so designed, and that everything actually occurred as stated in so many words.

2. But a modified view from this has been gradually developing through some years past. As reverent Bible scholars have studied the book more deeply and have come to understand better the methods of some of the Bible writers in communicating truth or enforcing lessons, they have been led to raise the question whether its author ever intended the book to be literal history; whether, on the contrary, he may not have felt free to employ parable or allegory as a setting for the lessons he had in mind—just as some of the great prophets, Isaiah, Ezekiel and others had done before him, and, as we know, the greatest of all teachers was accustomed to do after him. The Jewish people needed a great and striking lesson of tolerance, and the author's purpose was to impress this upon

them. May he not have felt entirely warranted in the use of a great figure to this end? Let anyone read the book candidly, with the thought in mind that it is a parable or an allegory, and everything will be seen to harmonize with that idea. Not that God could not do the remarkable things stated, if we take everything literally, but did He do so as a matter of fact? If this is the true view of the case—and much may be said in its favor—the embarrassing difficulties of the historical conception are relieved—they melt away of their own accord, while the real grandeur of the book and its lofty message are made to stand out in all the bolder relief. As Jonah, refusing to respond to Jehovah's call, is represented as seeking to flee from his presence by getting beyond his jurisdiction in a remote western city and was then made to suffer the pursuing consequences of his disobedience by being swallowed by a great fish, so the Jewish people suffered the pursuing consequences of their disobedience in disregarding the call of God to be a prophet nation to the world, by being swallowed up in captivity far to the eastward. In this the author was not emphasizing an unfamiliar figure, since the great powers at the east had been spoken of by the prophets as sea monsters, swallowing up the little western provinces of which Judah was one.

Thus we have the two views of the book of Jonah—the historical, that everything contained in it actually occurred, and the other, which would regard the story as a parable or an allegory, and that it was never intended to be anything else—any more than Jesus' parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, or Isaiah's "Song of the Vineyard" were to be taken literally. But whichever view is held, the lessons are essentially the same, which, after all, is the main thing.

We will now turn to the narrative itself, taking it as it stands, regardless of whether it is literal history or simply an

allegory, not delaying upon any difficult points growing out of the methods employed.

O Jewish people, hear the message which I bring to you. In the days of Israel's prosperity, when the great world power of Assyria was moving westward with a view to swallowing up the Mediterranean provinces, including your own, the call of God came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, to undertake the strange mission of going to Nineveh, capital of this hostile empire hundreds of miles distant to the northeastward, and in the name of Jehovah denounce its sins and call upon it to repent or suffer destruction as God's judgment upon it. Jonah, however, recognizing how great was God's mercy, and fearing that the Ninevites might repent as a result of his preaching and so obtain divine pardon, decided not to go. Rather, he would flee to Tarshish, probably in Spain, far to the westward. In this way he vainly thought to get beyond the jurisdiction of Jehovah, for then each nation had its own god or gods. So he went down to Joppa on the coast. Finding there a ship about to sail for Tarshish, he engaged passage, paying the fare, and went down into the hold. Here, wearied by his exertion in getting to the place of embarkation and by the mental excitement through which he had passed, he was soon fast asleep. But no sooner had the vessel started than a great tempest arose, and the fragile craft, propelled only by oars and sails, threatened every moment to go to pieces. Then the sailors, who were of all nationalities, were sore afraid. Terror seized upon them as they realized their peril. Unable to do anything to save themselves from the fury of the storm, they all began to pray, each one to the god of his own land, in the hope that in this way deliverance might be granted them. Meanwhile everything which could be torn loose was thrown overboard in

order to lighten the ship so that, perchance, she might weather the gale.

When the captain discovered that his passenger, Jonah, was asleep in the hold, he aroused him, expressing his astonishment that he should be sleeping at such a time, and commanded him also to call upon his God in the hope that possibly this one might be able to deliver them from the threatening peril. When finally none of these prayers brought relief, the sailors concluded, in accordance with a superstition of the age, that some one on board had incurred the displeasure of his god and that the tempest was a judgment in consequence. To determine the guilty one they had recourse to the lot, a not unusual practice then, and, strange to say, the lot fell upon Jonah. He was thus pointed out as the guilty one. Then they inquired of him what was his country, and his occupation, and what he had done that this calamity should have befallen them.

Then Jonah frankly told all. He said he was a Jew, worshiper of the god who ruled over sea and land, and that he was now a fugitive fleeing from a distasteful duty which had been imposed upon him. Hesitating to execute the death sentence upon him, for they were humane men, they asked him what they were to do to deliver themselves from the consequences of his sin.

Then the nobler qualities of Jonah asserted themselves and he acknowledged that he was the cause of their misfortunes, and told them to take him up and cast him into the sea, then the storm would subside and they would be safe. Still, in spite of all, the men rowed hard to get back to the land so that it would not be necessary to sacrifice the prophet. But their efforts were vain, the storm only increased in violence, and they were driven farther and farther away. At last, with a prayer to Jonah's God for deliverance from blood guiltiness

in what they were about to do, they cast Jonah overboard. Immediately there was a lull in the storm, and so profoundly were the sailors impressed that they were led to offer Jehovah appropriate sacrifices and vows.

Then the statement is made that Jehovah had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah, in which he was preserved alive. And here, in his narrow confinement, the prophet is represented as offering prayer to his God. He said in substance, quoting much from the Psalms, "In my hour of anguish, O God, and mental peril, I cried to thee for help, and thou hast delivered me. Thou didst cast me in the bottomless sea and its waves closed over me. I felt that the joys of life, the privilege of worshipping Thee, and of participating in the Temple service, were forever at an end. Then thou didst deliver me from the certain destruction which had overtaken me. In my despair I cried unto thee and thou didst answer. With deep joy will I renew my loyalty to thee and pay the vows which I have made in return for my deliverance, for thou alone canst save those who turn to thee."

After this submarine experience—which continued for three days—the author states that at Jehovah's command the great sea monster threw out the prophet unharmed upon the dry land—manifestly couldn't stomach him any longer! And now the divine call comes again to Jonah to go to Nineveh and proclaim the message which Jehovah would give him. This time instead of attempting to run away he proceeds promptly to respond, setting out upon the long journey at once. We can see him in imagination as he trudges along from day to day, sleeping upon the ground at night under the open heavens, wherever he happened to be. He has abundant opportunity for reflection, as he journeys, upon the strange ways of God's providence, until, after several weeks, he approaches the

great city. As he enters its miles of streets, he begins to proclaim the short but awful message—"Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed unless she repents."

When the prophet's words were reported to the king, he was greatly moved. He laid aside his royal attire and put on the garments of mourning. He also, in his own name and that of the nobles, issued a decree that every living being, man or beast, should join in a fast and be clothed in the garb of sorrow and humiliation. All his subjects were urged fervently to beseech God's pardon and abstain from all wrong-doing in the hope that He might relent and not execute upon them the judgment which He had announced through his prophet.

Then Jehovah, perceiving that the people had repented of their sinful deeds and were ready to reform, had mercy upon them, freely forgiving them, in accordance with his character and purpose always. The judgment which he had proposed was not executed upon them, and the city remained intact. But strange to say, this course on Jehovah's part was exceedingly displeasing to Jonah, though it would seem as if he would have been rejoiced at so remarkable an outcome of his preaching. Instead, forgetting his recent vows of loyalty, only jealousy and anger were aroused—typifying the attitude of the Jewish people toward their enemies, so desirous were they that the latter should become the victims of God's vengeance. In his vexation he gives expression to his feelings in a remarkable prayer: "When, O God, I was first commanded to go to Nineveh, I sought to flee from Thy presence, for I knew you to be merciful and tender, ready and eager to pardon those who manifest the least inclination toward true repentance. And now the very thing which I feared has come to pass. The people, as a result of the preaching which you commanded me to present to them, have repented and you have forgiven them.

But we Jews all believe they are deserving of judgment and destruction rather than forgiveness. Indeed I would rather die than see them the objects of your compassion and favor."

Then with the same tender love which he had manifested toward the ignorant but repenting heathen, Jehovah replied to Jonah's petulant outburst: "Are you really as angry, Jonah, as your intemperate words would suggest?" Without answering, Jonah went forth and made for himself a booth outside the walls of the city on the east side. Here he abode for a season, still hoping that some disaster might overtake the enemies of his race.

Next, Jehovah caused a green vine called a gourd to grow and cover the booth. By this means the prophet was protected from the heat of the burning eastern sun. It brought him great satisfaction. But to complete the lesson which he had in mind to teach, the Lord caused the vine to be destroyed by a worm. This brought great discomfort to Jonah, and he was very angry and again he prayed that he might die.

And now we come to the climax of the story and of the book, to which everything has been leading up. To impress the great lesson intended by the author, Jehovah is represented as rebuking the prophet, and through him the Jewish people. First of all he asks him, "Do you well, Jonah, to be angry for the gourd? Are you really warranted in the attitude you maintain, the indignation you express?"

"Yes," says Jonah in reply, "I do well to be angry even unto death, so angry that I am ready to die." Then said Jehovah, "Consider, Jonah, the utter unreasonableness and inconsistency of your postion. You are angry with me because I have seen fit to destroy a shortlived vine with whose creation and growth you had nothing to do and which I was under no obligation to create for your selfish comfort, but whose shade

you can no longer enjoy. At the same moment you are angry with me because I, the creator and ruler of the universe, have seen fit to show mercy and not to destroy the great city of Nineveh, whose people—six score thousand of them and more—I love, and whose salvation I desire as truly as I desire the salvation of the little race which you represent. Instead of rising to its high mission as a prophet nation, seeking in a spirit of love and good-will to carry a knowledge of myself and my salvation to the heathen nations about them less favored than themselves—as time and again the prophets have made clear is their duty—they have ignored the obligations and cherish only a spirit of bitter hatred toward all others than themselves and expect me to do the same and to bring destructive judgment upon them. Your narrow, bigoted and intolerant spirit, Jonah, reflects the attitude and spirit of your race, and the rebuke which I administer to you is intended for those you represent."

The story ends thus abruptly. Jonah does not attempt to reply to Jehovah, there is really nothing to be said. He has richly deserved the rebuke which he received, by his spirit and conduct, and he is left in no enviable position. The kind and merciful spirit which Jehovah cherished toward all people, stands out in striking contrast with the small, mean, contemptible spirit of his prophet.

Does the story suggest anything for our time?

1. One thing suggested is the impossibility of fleeing from the presence of the Lord now as truly as in Jonah's time. When a distasteful duty was laid upon him he sought to hide from the Almighty, as if such a thing were possible. Long before, the Psalmist had said (Psa. 139) "Whither shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and flee to the utter-

most parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me.'' So today and always. It is impossible to get away from God. Even if we could hide from His physical presence, if we were to conceive of Him as having a physical form, it would be impossible to get away from His spirit within, or from conscience through which He speaks to us. He is everywhere in the outer world—He is as truly in the inner world—understands all our thoughts and motives. Conscience is a great fact in our natures, and we cannot escape its accusing voice, if we give ourselves to wrong doing and sin. The only way to experience rest and peace within is through the consciousness of God's presence there. Instead of attempting to flee from Him, we ought to seek His indwelling.

2. This sermon-story, although designed to rebuke Jewish narrowness and bigotry at the time it was written, may be regarded as no less a rebuke to any similar spirit today. Under the presumptuous and conceited belief that Jehovah was interested in them exclusively, that they, the Jews, were his favorites and pets, and that he cared nothing for any other people in the world, they had come to center all thought upon themselves and to cherish prejudice and hatred toward all others, and to hope and pray that God would come in speedy judgment and destroy them. How contrary this to the spirit of their religion, as interpreted by their own prophets, who declared that it was intended to be world-wide in its scope, and that they themselves, as a prophet nation should give it to the world. In view of their failure both to live it and to publish it, and their unworthy motive in refusing to do the latter, their desert of the stinging rebuke of this story-sermon stands out from the very face of it. It is hardly necessary to point the moral.

But the same narrow and bigoted spirit is by no means extinct even yet. It reappears under various forms, as, for instance, in the strong sectarianism which prevails in some sections of the country—as if one's own denomination embodied all God's truth to the exclusion of all others; as if we and our church are all right, and the others all wrong; as if God cared for us only, and no others however good or even better! All of which is contrary to the entire spirit of the gospel and of the Master, who was interested in all his people, and in no one little sect alone. It may not be possible for all people, even the best, to see alike on all questions—there are many respects in which they may honestly differ—there is no necessary sin in that, and it is possible for Christian people to at least respect each other in their differing views, agree to disagree, and cherish a spirit of love and good will toward all. The sectarian spirit means narrowness and bigotry and is to be condemned now as of old.

3. The book of Jonah is one of the strongest supports of Foreign Missions to be found in the Bible. This is its spirit. Its outlook is world-wide. It was to engage in foreign missionary work that Jonah was called, and to be a prophet nation, a foreign missionary people in spirit and effort, to teach the heathen world about God and the true religion, was the special responsibility laid upon the Hebrew race. It was Jonah's refusal to obey the summons to him, personally, which led to all his troubles, and it was the neglect or the refusal of the Hebrew people to rise to their responsibility which led to the severe rebuke given to them in this book.

It is none the less our responsibility today as God's people, to do all in our power to extend the knowledge of Christ to those who are still in darkness. God would have us, as his chosen ones, to be the prophet people of the world. If we are

not concerned for the world's salvation, who will be? And if no one is prompted to do anything in behalf of the unsaved millions, what is to become of them? And if they are lost in consequence, who is to be held responsible?

The book of Jonah is a distinctively foreign missionary book. It sets forth the universal fatherhood of God and his interest in and love for all mankind as does no other until we come to the New Testament. Christ's last injunction to His disciples was to go forth to the ends of the earth and preach the gospel of forgiveness and love to all people. Paul was the first Christian foreign missionary under the Christian system. All the apostles, indeed, were foreign missionaries.

If we, as Christ's followers, partake of his spirit, this will be our attitude—love toward all, regardless of race, or color, or circumstances, and this not only with reference to those immediately about us, but to those in distant lands as well, with a disposition to do all in our power, directly and indirectly, for their spiritual uplift and betterment. If there is any one thing which is dear to the Master's heart, it is the salvation of the heathen world, and it is both our privilege and our duty to share that burden with Him.

It is somewhat remarkable, but none the less true, that all this is not only foreshadowed but plainly taught in this little book of Jonah. It is the foreign missionary book of the Old Testament.

No student of the Bible who has at all comprehended the meaning and wide reach of this sermon-story, will wonder at what one of the greatest of Bible scholars once said: "I have read the book of Jonah one hundred times at least, and I will publicly avow that I cannot even now take up the marvelous book—nay, nor even speak of it—without tears rising to my eyes."

DANIEL

CHAPTER XVII

(Map of O. T. World)

NO Book of the Bible has been more misunderstood and misused than the book of Daniel. Much has been read into it and much has been drawn out of it of which the author never dreamed. By many, everything in it, including all its peculiar figurative expressions, has been interpreted regardless of its connections or the context. References to a past age have been carried over into an indefinite future. It has been believed by not a few that the entire future history of the world is here set forth, a map given of all coming time. From various mysterious references and from certain numerals which appear, the exact time of the second coming of Christ and the end of the world have been calculated, always, of course, but to fail; while many people in view of these calculations have abandoned their regular occupations, like some of the Thessalonian Christians of old, and have prepared ascension robes, which, however, they have never had occasion to put on. The question of the real aim of the book as a whole has either been misapprehended or entirely ignored, while the historical settings and the peculiar type of literature employed have had no place in the determination of its significance. The fanciful and unwarranted meanings which have been deduced have been a confusion to many, an embarrassment to others, and have disgusted not a few.

And still the mysteries of the book have possessed a peculiar charm for certain types of mind. Although its diffi-

culties are recognized by Biblical scholars, it has, nevertheless, been a prolific source of texts for many least able to handle them. The problems involved have been solved with a confidence which real Bible students might well covet. The figures and symbols employed have, without the least hesitation or question, been applied to things present and to come, and whenever some unusual or startling event has occurred, as the world-war in Europe for example, a fulfilment of some of these supposed predictions has been confidently asserted.

Thus there has been no end of attempted interpretations of the book—some of them absurd in the extreme. The literature which has accumulated on the subject is enormous and is a curiosity. And yet despite all the peculiar and mysterious things about it and the constant, though perhaps unintended abuse of it by many, it is a noble book. It had a noble mission in its time, and it abounds in inspiration and cheer for God's people in all ages.

In view of all, one may well approach the task of seeking to understand the book with hesitancy, certainly with modesty. Yet there are a few fundamental principles of interpretation which, applied—as too often they are neglected—cannot fail to throw light upon its meaning.

One of these principles to be applied here, as with reference to all other Bible books, is that of studying it historically, i. e. in the light of the circumstances or the historical situation out of which it sprung or which called it forth, and the object which the author or compiler had in mind in preparing it. The former throws light upon and helps to determine the latter.

Another thing which calls for special investigation is the fact of the unusual style in which the book was written, or rather the latter half of it, a style which has been termed "apocalyptic," and which was peculiar, among Jewish writers,

to a certain period, since this also would naturally have an important bearing upon its meaning.

Upon its face, the book would seem to be a history of Daniel, a Jewish exile to Babylonia from a few years prior to the fall of Jerusalem, 586 B. C. He is represented as having lived at the court of Nebuchadrezzar and to have survived to the days of Cyrus, the Persian conqueror of Babylon. It has been supposed, and is still held by some, that the book was either the work of Daniel himself, or of a contemporary who gathered up the narratives, supposed to be literal history, and joined to them Daniel's own account of his visions, supposed to embody revelations of the future which had been made known to him.

But in times more recent a different view of the origin of the book has met with increasing acceptance. It is one which has much to be said in its favor. It is that it dates not from the age in which Daniel's career is placed, but from the close of the period to which its visions refer—in other words, from the days of Antiochus Epiphanes (about 168-164 B. C.); that its apparent outlines of the future are really past history thrown by the author into the form of ancient prediction; that the narratives, though probably founded more or less upon historical tradition, are to be regarded chiefly as stories with a practical moral and valuable on that account; that the aim of the writer both in the narratives and the visions was to encourage the Jews to steadfastness and loyalty to their faith under the religious persecution of Antiochus; and that the true prophetic element in the book lies not in outlining all future history, but in the confident anticipation of the overthrow of God's enemies and the establishment of God's kingdom, the triumph of God's people, and the final reward of the righteous.

Another view is that the kernel of the book may have been Daniel's work, but that in the Maccabean period it was redacted, or edited and expanded and the message put into the mouth of Daniel. It was clearly a message for the Maccabean age, whether it had been employed as a message for Daniel's age or not.

Whichever view of the book is held—and it is of very little practical consequence—its essential teaching remains unaltered and its permanent value is unaffected. Its principal idea is that of the ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of God over all the kingdoms of this world.

After this forecast in general over the nature and origin of the book, we will consider next, more in detail, the historical settings or the situation out of which it sprung. According to the second view, which seems to have the preponderating support of Biblical scholars, the book is believed to have come from the darkest period of Jewish history. From 168-164 B. C.—the little state of Judah was controlled by Syria, one of the kingdoms which resulted from the division of the Greek empire after the death of Alexander. The Syrian king during these years was Antiochus IV, called Antiochus Epiphanes, a man was was keen and clever but entirely unscrupulous, a veritable eastern Nero. He sought to unify the diverse oriental elements of his kingdom by crushing out all the old native faiths among them and compelling them to adopt a uniform religion, and that the Greek, which was a heathen religion. This, to the Jews, who clung to their own religion with an unyielding grasp, was something which called for resistance to the death, and many utterly refused to submit. Thereupon Antiochus sent an army to Jerusalem which massacred many of the people on the Sabbath day when the Jewish law did not allow them to defend themselves. The Temple was desecrated in a shameful

manner. Swine, the abomination of all Jews, were sacrificed on its great altar. A law was made that anyone who worshiped Jehovah or read the Scriptures was to be put to death. Then a detachment of the army was sent about to the towns and the people were compelled to sacrifice to the Greek gods upon the altars which they set up. Everywhere there was distress and suffering among the Jews, with constant temptation to let go their faith or apostatize from it. The outcome was the Maccabean war, started by an old Jewish priest and carried on by his sons after his death. A revolt was thus started which nothing could stop.

At last, after a long hard struggle, the Jews won their national freedom, which they were able to maintain for one hundred years. It was from this period of distress and suffering that it is believed the book of Daniel came. Its object was to encourage the people to hold fast their religion in the midst of the persecutions to which they were being subjected. When read in the light of this aim, it is one of the most inspiring books in the Old Testament. Apart from it, it is a hopeless tangle of obscure symbolisms and historical incongruities.

The book is divided into two sections:

1. Stories about Daniel and his friends, chs. 1-6.
2. Visions of Daniel, chs. 7-12.

Each of these two sections has the same general purpose or aim, encouragement to hold fast to their religion in the midst of persecution and suffering, although each seeks its end by different means.

There would be too much ground to cover adequately to review the entire book—both these sections—in one lecture. Only a bird's eye view over the wide field can be attempted.

First as to the story section. As we notice some of these stories we shall see how admirably adapted they were to stimu-

late faith and courage to endure trial in the distressful period for which they were written and circulated—this by examples of magnificent heroism of the faith of other days. These stories, with others, had doubtless been handed down through various generations by word of mouth, and the author now gathers them together for his purpose. He is not so much concerned for their historical accuracy, as with the lessons or the moral to be drawn from them. These narratives are all quite familiar to us, some from our childhood days, but a rehearsal of a few of them, in the light of their purpose, can hardly fail to be instructive and helpful even in our day.

This is the list of them, a chapter being devoted to each one:

Ch. 1. The training of Daniel and his companions.
Ch. 2. The Dream Image.
Ch. 3. The Fiery Furnace.
Ch. 4. The Madness of Nebuchadnezzar.
Ch. 5. Belshazzar's Feast.
Ch. 6. Daniel and the Den of Lions.

The first story has to do with Jewish youths who had been taken into captivity at the time Jerusalem was destroyed (586 B. C.) or a few years before. They were to be prepared for service in high station. Daniel was one of them. He and the rest determined not to defile themselves with the diet proposed, which was unlawful to them according to the Jehovah religion, and they suggested the simple diet to which they had been accustomed. The test was permitted, with the result that their physical condition at the end of a specified time was better by far than that of others who had followed the prescribed bill of fare. God's favor rested upon them because of their fidelity to their religious convictions, and they were given knowledge and understanding beyond all those to whom the king had been

accustomed to refer difficult matters for solution. The lesson is that God will stand by those who stand fast for him—just the lesson needed for the suffering Jews at the time of Antiochus.

Another story is of the three young men who refused to bow down to a great image which the king had caused to be set up, commanding that all do so on pain of being thrown into a fiery furnace. He had gathered all the dignitaries of the provinces of his vast empire to be present at the dedication. When the signal was given, all prostrated themselves as directed save the three young men. When this was reported to the king, in his anger he called them before him and censured them severely. Then he declared that he would give them a further opportunity. They refused to recede from their position. Their God could deliver them, but whether He did so or not they declared that they would not worship his image. Thereupon the king commanded the furnace to be made seven times hotter than usual, and they were thrown in.

But the fire did not harm them. A fourth person, in appearance like unto the gods, seemed to be moving about with them among the flames. Then the king, astonished, called out to the young men to come forth, which they did, but with no smell of fire upon their garments. The story showed that the God of these young men was more powerful to protect His own than were even great kings to harm them. The king was so impressed that he issued a decree that anyone in the realm who said aught against these young men should be cut in pieces, and he blessed the God who had delivered them and declared that there was none other like him.

What an encouragement to those who were in the fiery furnace of affliction in the time of Antiochus.

Another impressive and inspiring story is that of the handwriting on the wall. During the progress of a great feast given

by Belshazzar, the king, to his lords, this is what appeared. The king was greatly perplexed and filled with fear. After his wise men had failed to interpret, Daniel, the Jew, was suggested to him and he was brought in. He declared that he had no power in himself to interpret but his God could give him the meaning. The king promised great rewards if he could give the interpretation, which Daniel at once declined to consider. Then, after boldly pointing out the king's evil course, he declared that the meaning of the words of the handwriting (Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin) was: "Thou art weighed in the balances and found wanting. The kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

The record states that that night the king was slain and that Darius, the Mede, received the kingdom. Such a story shows how the judgments of God will overtake the wicked. So it would be with Antiochus.

The final story is of Daniel cast into the lion's den. The king had promoted him to be one of three presidents over the one hundred and twenty satraps of the realm, he being distinguished above all because of the excellent spirit which was in him. Then all these officials, probably through jealousy, sought to find some ground for making charges against him as touching the kingdom, but failed. Their next step was to propose to the king to issue a decree that whoever, for thirty days, should offer a petition to any god save to the king, should be cast into a den of lions. When Daniel knew that the writing had been signed, he went into his house, as had been his wont, and knelt in prayer three times a day, with his window open toward Jerusalem. This the alert enemies soon discovered, yet because of the decree and the clamors of these officials, the only thing which the king could do, although with great regret, was to let the punishment fall upon his trusted Daniel, and he was cast into the den of lions.

At the same time the king cherished a secret hope that Daniel's God would in some way deliver him. He spent a sleepless night. Very early in the morning he arose and went in haste to the den. As he drew near he cried out in a lamentable voice inquiring if Daniel was still alive. Daniel replied from the den that he was; that his God had sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so no harm had come to him. All this, the story says, because Daniel trusted God. So he was taken out. Then the king commanded that all the accusers of Daniel, with their families, be cast into the den. The lions promptly dispatched them all. Next the king issued a decree and sent it broadcast through the land, all the provinces of the empire, that all men fear and tremble before the God of Daniel. "For He is the living God and His kingdom shall not be destroyed." Here again the story is of precisely the character to give stimulus to steadfastness and loyalty to God in times of persecution.

And so of all of them. Could a better selection have been made for the purpose in view, by the author or compiler of the book? They afford a most effective plea for courage and faith in that dark period, and must have brought great comfort and cheer to those who were suffering. God who had cared for His loyal and devoted ones in the past, was able to do so still to those who trusted Him. And the central message of strength and courage and hope is not without value to God's people in suffering today.

We turn now to a bird's-eye glance over the second section of the book, the Visions, the obscure part. (Chs. 7-12)

We must remember that the general aim of the two sections is the same, although a different method from that of the first section is employed in the second.

The first thing which impresses us is the style of language here found. It is vague, mystical, made up of strange and symbolic visions. The reason for this is probably to be found in the fact that the author would say things in regard to existing conditions which it would not have been safe to say openly, as that the existing government would be destroyed, or that the king would come to grief. The Jews, who understood the symbolism, could thus be reached with messages of hope and cheer, while their enemies would be none the wiser if the writing should fall into their hands.

The style of writing thus employed is called "apocalyptic." It was different from anything heretofore found in the Old Testament, save slight touches of it in Ezekiel and Zechariah. It is a style in which strange, unusual, often grotesque figures are used. They cannot be taken literally since there would be no significance to them. Something similar is found in the New Testament Book of Revelation. It was a style of writing or type of literature which was in use among the Jews for perhaps two centuries B. C., and one hundred or more years A. D. Many works of that kind have come to light from that period during recent years. All have the same general characteristics. They were usually written in times of persecution and trouble. The authors sought to conceal their own personalities—their own safety may have depended upon it. Accordingly they frequently put their messages in the mouths of great characters of their past history—as if Enoch, Noah, Moses, Daniel, or others were speaking. These old worthies were represented as predicting the course of events from their time on to the time of the author—always stopping there, not going farther. It was thus not a real prediction though a semblance of it. It was simply a rehearsal of past history in the form of prediction, up to the present, with which the author was familiar, and from which

lessons could be drawn, which was his chief aim. Frequently this period of history was wrapped up in symbolic visions.

The second part of the Book of Daniel bears the closest possible resemblance to this peculiar type of literature. It is apparently predictive but not really so. The usual apocalyptic ideas of present suffering, future conflict, final triumph are all there, together with other characteristics of the writing of the period. The conclusion is but natural, therefore, that the book called by the name of Daniel, came from the period when such literature flourished, more particularly a season of persecution which seems clearly to be indicated, the period of Antiochus Epiphanes, 168-164 B. C. Into that period the book fits completely, and the aim here, as in the story part, is to encourage the suffering Jews to hold fast to their religion in spite of all, when the temptation to apostatize from it to escape from suffering was constant and pressing. The writer chose Daniel of the time of the Babylonish captivity as his mouth-piece, although very little is said about Babylonian times. He seems to predict in regard to coming great kingdoms, one after another. But in reality it is simply a review of past history from Daniel's time to the time of the author—this instead of being carried forward to the day of judgment and the end of the world. As God had destroyed oppressing nations of the past, so he would destroy the oppressing nation now, and the time of this was not far away. If only God's people could hold on a while longer, their enemies would be destroyed.

To sum up, the general significance of the second part of the book seems to be about this: First that God presides over the history of the world, that of Gentile nations as well as that of the Jews, and that everything proceeds according to a divine plan toward a final consummation. If at any time any nation breaks into oppression and injustice toward God's people, as

was the case then, he would humble it in the end. The persecution was only a precursor of the certain judgment to come. God would himself inaugurate a kingdom of righteousness which would triumph over every foe and endure forever, indeed its triumph was already nigh. If loyalty to one's faith, meanwhile, should in some cases lead to death, the reward of that loyalty would come in the future; no one would be deprived of it in the end. Thus we have an Old Testament glimpse into a future life. The central thought all through was the ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of God in spite of obstacles. It would be absolutely irresistible. All the visions and symbols bear upon this, and this was the inspiration which this second section was intended to impart. All that really has any semblance to actual prophecy, or prediction rather, is simply that foreshadowed in the final triumph of the Kingdom of God. There is no reference directly or indirectly to the second coming of Christ or the end of the world, nor do the numbers employed have any hidden meaning for the future or future events, but simply relate to that age and to the period preceding. The "little horn" spoken of clearly refers to Antiochus. The book as a whole, with its narratives of heroic faith and endurance of the past, and its symbolic visions, carried a great lesson for that time. It was a trumpet call to fidelity in spite of existing persecutions, with assurances in regard to the early triumph of God's kingdom over all enemies, and its establishment to endure forever. The final struggle was even then under way. It must have done much to brace up the faith of those who might otherwise have become discouraged and given way.

Thus we have outlined this difficult and mysterious book as reviewed by reverent scholarship today. It is difficult and mysterious in its language, its symbols and figures—for a purpose at that time—although there is nothing difficult or

mysterious in the message itself, which was simply to stimulate a persevering faith in those whose hope and courage might be wavering and in danger of giving way. We have considered the historical situation out of which it sprung, the terrible persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes, and the peculiar style of language, the apocalyptic, employed in the second part, then so common, which Jews, possessing the key, would understand, but which their enemies would not. Nowhere else in the Bible is it so necessary to understand these things of the historical situation and background, if we would understand the meaning of the book.

Studied in this way, we see how much of the fantastical interpretations, now so common, is swept away; that there is no warrant for the assumption that we have here a map for the entire future history of the world, or that the book abounds in hidden meanings for all time, or with special reference to events transpiring in our own or any other time. The book had primary reference to its own time, and its narrative was for the suffering and persecuted people of that period, having the one common aim all through to stimulate faith and hope for the suffering people addressed.

And yet while primarily a book for its own time, it is also a book for all time, with its magnificent lessons of faith, of how God cares for his own and is able to protect and deliver them, and of how righteousness is bound to triumph in the end and the wicked to come to naught. Even when everything in it of a transient or secondary value has been discounted, its central message of strength and courage is calculated to be helpful for all time. Rightly regarded the book is a spiritual tonic for every believing one today.

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